In Their Surroundings: Localizing Modern Jewish Literatures in Eastern Europe

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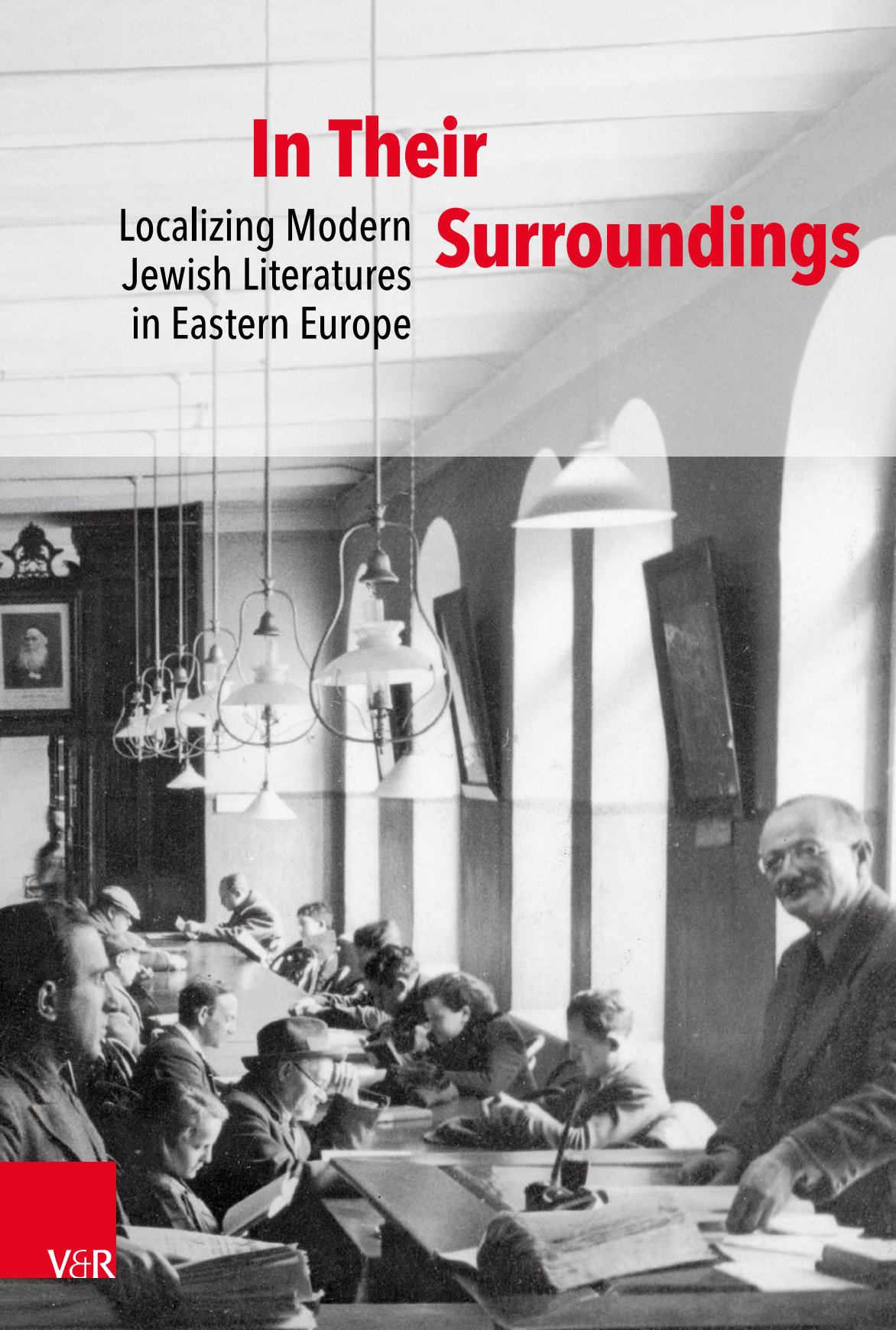
In Their Surroundings

Localizing Modern Jewish Literatures in Eastern Europe



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Leibniz Institute for Jewish History and Culture –
Simon Dubnow

EFRAT GAL-ED, NATASHA GORDINSKY,
SABINE KOLLER, YFAAT WEISS (EDS.)

In Their Surroundings

Localizing Modern Jewish Literatures in Eastern Europe

Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht

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Preface

"In truth we are, along with our [Yiddish] language, our literature, and our whole intellectual capacity, *polyterritorial*, that is, we are not afloat in the air, not uprooted from the ground; on the contrary, we draw nurture from various soils, are under the influence of various climate zones, various surroundings. The effects of these *all* meet one another, join together, come into conflict or unite with our common national work."

Shmuel Niger, 1922[1]

"אין דער אמת'ן זיינען מיר אינאיינעם מיט אונזער שפּראַך און ליטעראַטור און אונזער גאַנצען גייסטיגען פארמעגען — פאָליטעריטאָריאַל, ד. ה. מיר שוועבען ניט אין דער לופטען, מיר זיינען ניט אפגעריסען פון באָדען, נאר, פערקעהרט, מיר ציהען די חיונה פון פארשיידענע באָדענס, געפינען זיך אונטער דעם איינפלוס פון פארשיידענע קלימאַטען, פארשיידענע סביבה'ס. זייערע אָלעמענס ווירקונגען בעגעגענען זיך, קומען זיך צונויף, שטויסען זיך צוזאַמען אדער בעהעפטען זיך אין אונזער אַלגעמיין נאַציאָנאַלען שאַפען."

"Choose a language as one chooses a ring. This privilege of choosing a language as one does a wedding ring, chanting: with this ring you are my sacred."

Leah Goldberg, 1946[2]

"לבחור לשון כמי שבוחר לו טבעת. הזכות הזאת לבחור בלשון כבטבעת קידושין ולברך עליה, הרי את מקודשת."

"The Jewish literature is not deteriorating, heaven forbid. It is one and its name is one. Rather, it appears to the reader in two forms, and like the swaying plates of a scale, up and down against each other. And just like in nature, where there are no absolutes, so the scales sway up and down."

Bal-Makhshoves, 1910[3]

"די יודישע ליטעראַטור געהט חלילה נישט צו גרונד. זי איז איינע און איהר נאָמען איז איינער. נור זי קומט צום לעזער אין צוויי געשטאַלטען, און ווי די שאָלען אויפ'ן וואָגשאָל שאָקלען זיי זיך איינער אָנטקעגען דער אָנדערער. און אָזוי ווי אין דער נאַטור איז קיין זאַך נישט אַבסאָלוט — בעווען זיך די שאָלען אַרויף און אַראָפ."

When, in 1910, eminent critic Bal-Makhshoves ("Man of Thoughts," pen name of Isidor Elyashev) coined the image of two plates (two languages) being part of one scale (one literature) in his article *Tsvey shprakhen—eyn*

1 Shmuel Niger, Di gegent-frage in der idisher literatur. An entfer Bal-Makhshovesn [The Territorial Question in Yiddish Literature. A Response to Bal-Makhshoves], in: Di Tsukunft [The Future] 27 (1922), no. 5, 308–314, here 308. Unpublished translation by Yaakov Herskovitz.

2 Leah Goldberg, Ve-hu ha-or [And This Is the Light], Merhavia 1946, 205. Unpublished translation by Yaakov Herskovitz.

3 See Bal-Makhshoves, Tsvey shprakhen—eyn eyntsige literatur [Two Languages—One Literature], in: idem, Geklibene shriften [Selected Writings], 2 vols., here vol. 2, Vilna 1910, 63–71, here 65. Unpublished translation by Yaakov Herskovitz.

eyntsige literatur (Two Languages—One Literature), he aptly promoted the unity of a dynamic bilingual Jewish literature. Bal-Makhshoves is a sagacious and reliable voice when tracing the formation of modern Jewish literatures.[4] This profound and far-reaching process began in the second half of the nineteenth century in Eastern Europe, primarily in provincial capitals and towns located in the historical region of the Jewish Pale of Settlement in the Russian Empire. The historical, political, and sociocultural constellations of the time had a crucial impact on Jewish literary thinking. Jewish culture in Eastern Europe evolved in close connection with the Central and Eastern European imperial and minority languages specific to the Russian, German, and Austro-Hungarian cultures. The development led, on the one hand, to the participation of Jews in the intellectual and literary achievements in these languages. On the other hand, it generated a flow of aesthetic ideals and political ideologies from the surrounding majority cultures into the Jewish discourses in the Yiddish and Hebrew languages. The "two forms," i. e. the literatures in Yiddish and Hebrew, in their polylingual environments were decisive for the evolution of Jewish secular culture from the turn of the nineteenth century onward. While literary works were preoccupied with the existential dilemmas of the Jewish people, they nevertheless relied on the philosophical apparatus of Russian and German literatures and thought (Friedrich Schiller, Friedrich Nietzsche, Rainer Maria Rilke, Aleksandr Pushkin, Fëdor Dostoevskiy, Lev Tolstoy, Anton Chekhov, Aleksandr Blok, Anna Akhmatova, and many more). The keen interest of early Hebrew and Yiddish writers in Russian and German cultures made way for the Europeanization of modern Jewish literatures.[5] An important dimension of this development was the continuing endeavor of translating German and Russian literary and philosophical writings into Hebrew and Yiddish, thereby preserving their humanistic legacy.

Within a vibrant polylingual and multicultural atmosphere, an eventful history marked by revolutions, the breakdown of empires, the rise (or reappearance) of young nations (partly with an inflated sense of nationalism), and mass migration to the New World, a modern Jewish literary thinking took shape. Numerous processes of cultural transfer played a major role in forging the concept of Europe for Eastern European Jewish intellectuals. In

4 Dan Miron offers a critical revision of this concept, replacing Bal-Makhshoves' slogan by "One text (written in two languages)—two totally separate literatures." See idem, From Continuity to Contiguity. Toward a New Jewish Literary Thinking, Stanford, Calif., 2010, 224f. and 282 (quote).

5 For the role of the German language in the making of modern Jewish culture, see Marc Volovici, German as a Jewish Problem. The Language Politics of Jewish Nationalism, Stanford, Calif., 2020.

Hebrew literature, Uri Nissan Gnessin, Gershon Shofman, or Yosef Ḥayyim Brenner, among others, modelled their literary writings in imagined and real contact zones where European and Russian modernist trends were inspiring paragons. In Gomel, they avidly read and translated Chekhov, admired Charles Baudelaire, discussed the differences in the poetics of Maksim Gor'kiy and Andrey Belyy, and studied German. Whereas at the same time in other places, be it a Volhynian shtetl, Lithuanian Vilna, or the metropolis of Kyiv, their Yiddish-writing colleagues—Dovid Bergelson, Moyshe Kulbak, Perets Markish, and others—were eager to get hold of journals, almanacs, anthologies, or books of Russian Symbolist poetry, Russian and Ukrainian Futurist verse, or German Expressionism.

This concept of European culture was disseminated in the literary imagination of Jewish writers and expanded with the emergence of modernist movements in Europe. Based mainly in Eastern and Central European metropolises, Jewish literatures offered new aesthetic forms through which to understand, and come to terms with, modernity. Jewish intellectuals became the messengers of "travelling concepts," be they radical political ideas or literary norms and conventions. Their acculturation to hegemonic cultures was accompanied by the adaptation of narrative models and critical paradigms that brought about fundamental changes in the conceptualization of history, Jewish collectiveness, Jewish spaces, and literature itself. However, the encounter of Jewish intellectuals with hegemonic cultures took place in specific regional contexts and through contacts with other, nonimperial cultures. As a result, Eastern European Jewish literatures faced different and even contradictory tendencies: universalism vs. particularism, Russification/Germanization vs. Jewish nationalism, and localism vs. cosmopolitanism.

While Hebrew and Yiddish literatures evolved employing similar strategies, a dominant dynamic between them was the battle between Hebraists and Yiddishists, pursued with much political and ideological vehemence and resulting in considerable bitterness, particularly on the side of the Yiddishists. Nevertheless, looking across the Hebraist-Yiddishist divide from today's point of view, it could be argued that the two young literatures shared the same vision of what literature ought to be and achieve, and how it should do that. As polyglot intellectuals, some Jewish authors decided to use a single language, while others wrote in both Hebrew and Yiddish. The emerging literatures in the two Jewish languages thus formed one multilingual system, which was constituted by dynamic interactions and linguistic crossovers that could include Russian, Polish, Ukrainian, German, and other languages.

The dynamic multicultural and polyphonic literary life outlined above was the object of investigation of the research project "In Their Sur-

roundings: Localizing Modern Jewish Literatures in Eastern Europe," funded by the German-Israeli Foundation for Scientific Research and Development (2017–2019). The project, based in Düsseldorf, Haifa, Jerusalem, and Regensburg, explored important developments in Hebrew and Yiddish literatures in the first decades of the twentieth century in the Eastern European context, utilizing the research possibilities that emerged following the political earthquake of 1989/90. Adding local and spatial perspectives to a comparative study of modern Hebrew and Yiddish literatures in Eastern Europe, it aimed at capturing their regional and transnational impact. The project further examined the dynamic interactions between Jewish literatures and Eastern European literatures as a history of what Mary Louise Pratt calls "contact zones."[6] Written against the backdrop of the dramatic political events of the end of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century, Yiddish and Hebrew works posed radical questions about the future of Jewish culture on the European continent. The discriminatory conditions that encumbered their authors' cultural ties to the European world required "transversal" thinking;[7] a constant resituating of the minority culture and eventual clarification of the relations between the Jewish and European paradigms. What in the historical-ideological process tended toward exclusion and homogenization, acquired an impressively dynamic, pluralizing, and diversifying effect in literature. This arose from a belief not only in the interconnectedness of Jewish literary life but also in its close affinity to the surrounding world, as reflected, for example, in the Yiddish concept of *doikayt* ("hereness"). For these reasons, the concept of space adopted in this volume is not based on an essentialist and precarious conjunction of nation, language, and territory, but stresses notions of fluidity, permeability, movement, and geographical knowledge. Thus, the project traced literature and cultural knowledge on the move not in terms of homogenization but with respect to their dynamics, productive differences, and pluralism. It explored "sites and relations of [literary and cultural] translation."[8] Guided by the idea of a provincialized, i.e. decentralized, fluid and multifarious modernity, the space was approached from a translational perspective, in an attempt to discern the powerful interactions and the interconnectedness of Jewish literatures with a multicultural envisioned emphasis on space (Eastern Europe) and sites (Gomel, Kyiv, etc.). However, once pointed out on a map, these sites cannot be retained. Although being geographically the same,

6 See Mary Louise Pratt, Arts of the Contact Zone, in: Profession (1991), 33–40.
7 See Wolfgang Welsch, Vernunft. Die zeitgenössische Vernunftkritik und das Konzept der transversalen Vernunft, Frankfurt a. M. 1995, 762.
8 James Clifford, Routes. Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century, Cambridge, Mass., 1997, 23.

they are constantly on the move, shifting between the imaginary and the real, as well as between political entities and various languages. In the worst case, places may simply disappear while still represented on a map.

This catalogue is the outcome of a conference which took place from 23 to 25 October 2018 at the Leibniz Institute for Jewish History and Culture – Simon Dubnow in the city of Leipzig. The aim of the conference, entitled "Shared Space—Contact Zones: Modern Hebrew and Yiddish Literature in Eastern Europe," was to bring together different perspectives on Yiddish and Hebrew literatures beyond overly rigid concepts of *one* national literature, *one* national literary history, *one* literary canon. While enabling the encounter of different scholarly traditions, the multilingual conference created a productive Babel-like situation, in which scholars from Israel, Germany, and the United States discussed together Hebrew and Yiddish literary texts in their original and in translation. One of the challenging questions the conference addressed was how this extremely dynamic field of literary contacts, contexts, and intertextual dialogues can be accessed today. The hermeneutic approach at the core of both conference and catalogue might be described with Rita Felski's recent concept of "transtemporal communities." It foregrounds the collective dimension of critique as an act "that draws strength from a communal 'we' extending across time as well as space."[9]

The methodological focal point of the conference was close reading, a "reading in slow motion"[10] of Yiddish and Hebrew texts reflecting the following interrelated topics:[11] Eastern European urban sites as a poetic space in Jewish literary imagination; literary representations of migration; and relations between Eastern European literatures with Hebrew and Yiddish literature respectively. Within this realm of "contact zones," the catalogue discusses the transformations of chronotopes and epistemes concerning genres, literary norms, motifs, and ideologies. Itamar Even-Zohar's idea of literary polysystems, Dan Miron's integral literary bi-/multilingualism,[12] Mieke Bal's "travelling concepts," Samuel N. Eisenstadt's "multiple modernities," and Mary Louise Pratt's "contact zones" all provide the frame of reference for a multilingual encounter of modern Jewish literatures

9 Rita Felski, The Limits of Critique, Chicago, Mich./London 2015, 49.
10 Reuben A. Brower, Reading in Slow Motion, in: idem/Richard Poirier (eds.), In Defense of Reading. A Reader's Approach to Literary Criticism, New York 1962, 4–21.
11 On the reappraisal of the concept of "close reading" and its relevance for the study of modernism, see David James (ed.), Modernism and Close Reading, Oxford 2020.
12 See Itamar Even-Zohar, Polysystem Theory, in: Poetics Today 1 (1979), no. 1–2, 287–310; Miron, From Continuity to Contiguity, chap. 9, esp. 287–295.

with manifold cross-references and entanglements.[13] The literary scholar and translator Benjamin Harshav once suggested viewing the encounter between early twentieth-century Yiddish and Hebrew writers and the European literary tradition in the following way:

> "[T]he history of European literature was discovered by Jewish writers at the end of its development, when it was challenged from within. For the exultant discoverers, that history appeared not as a history but as a synchronic 'imaginary museum' where all displays were placed in adjacent rooms, from which they could pick models and influences with no historical order."[14]

The structure of this catalogue mirrors one of its essential goals, namely to familiarize the reader with the polyphony of significant Yiddish and Hebrew literary voices that arose in the first half of the twentieth century in Eastern Europe. Each voice, i.e. each author and one of their literary works, with its "after-life" in diverse cultural contexts, is discussed in an introduction and in a close reading written by two different scholars. Inter alia, the catalogue features texts by Israeli writers Sivan Beskin and Matan Hermoni, thus creating an intriguing dialogue between contemporary literati and modernist prose.

The variety of literary genres—the lyrical poem, short story, novella and novel, ego document—as well as literary translations were crucial for the development of Jewish Eastern European modernism, as they embodied what Mikhail Bakhtin called the creative memory of genre. His assertion that "genre lives in the present, but always remembers its past, its beginning"[15] is especially relevant for the different genres presented in this volume as they adopt and creatively transform European literary models. The decision to explore these texts through the lens of close reading allows for greater attention to these poetic transformations as well as to the texture of literary writings. Furthermore, the renewed practice of reading, as Mieke Bal suggests, may reflect and offer a potential bridge between the "microscopic view"[16] and the larger cultural issues that are at stake—in this case, the continuous cultural negotiation between, and juxtaposition of, the minor and major literatures and the intimate connection of modern

13 Mieke Bal, Travelling Concepts in the Humanities. A Rough Guide, Toronto 2002; Samuel N. Eisenstadt, Multiple Modernities, in: Dædalus 129 (2000), no. 1, 1–29; Pratt, Arts of the Contact Zone.

14 Benjamin Harshav, Language in Time of Revolution, Stanford, Calif., 1993, 28.

15 Mikhail Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, ed. and transl. by Caryl Emerson, with an introduction by Wayne C. Booth, Minneapolis, Minn., 1984, 105.

16 Mieke Bal, Close-Ups and Mirrors. The Return of Close Reading, with a Difference, in: idem (ed.), The Practice of Cultural Analysis. Exposing Interdisciplinary Interpretation, Stanford, Calif., 1999, 137–142, here 138.

Hebrew and Yiddish literatures with their Eastern European surroundings. In these desperate times, may this catalogue make a modest contribution to the long journey through fascinating literary landscapes, some of which have already vanished and others that are on the verge of destruction.

At the end of this preface, we would like to thank all those who have paved the way for our project and, ultimately, for this publication. We extend our deepest gratitude to the Leonid Nevzlin Research Center for Russian and East European Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the German Research Foundation (DFG), and the German-Israeli Foundation for Scientific Research and Development (GIF) for their support and generous funding at different stages of this project. Our special thanks go to the contributing authors who willingly embraced our concept and made their research available to us. We gratefully acknowledge the help of our colleagues in archives and other institutions, above all the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York, the National Library of Israel, and the Gnazim Archive—Hebrew Writers Association, who served our requests for text sources and images with the utmost commitment. We moreover wish to express our sincere gratitude to Yael Levi, who initiated the communication with authors and collected much of the text material, Tim Corbett, David B. Greenberg, and Lawrence A. Rosenwald for their English translations, Margarita Lerman for her assistance in reproducing and editing the Hebrew source citations and bibliographic references, and Jana Duman for the language editing of the volume. She did an excellent job. Last but not least, it was our great pleasure to work with our colleagues from the Editorial Department of the Dubnow Institute, namely Petra Klara Gamke-Breitschopf, Carolin Piorun, and, in the final weeks, Felix Müller. Their work has made an invaluable contribution to the final shape and form of this Digital Catalogue.

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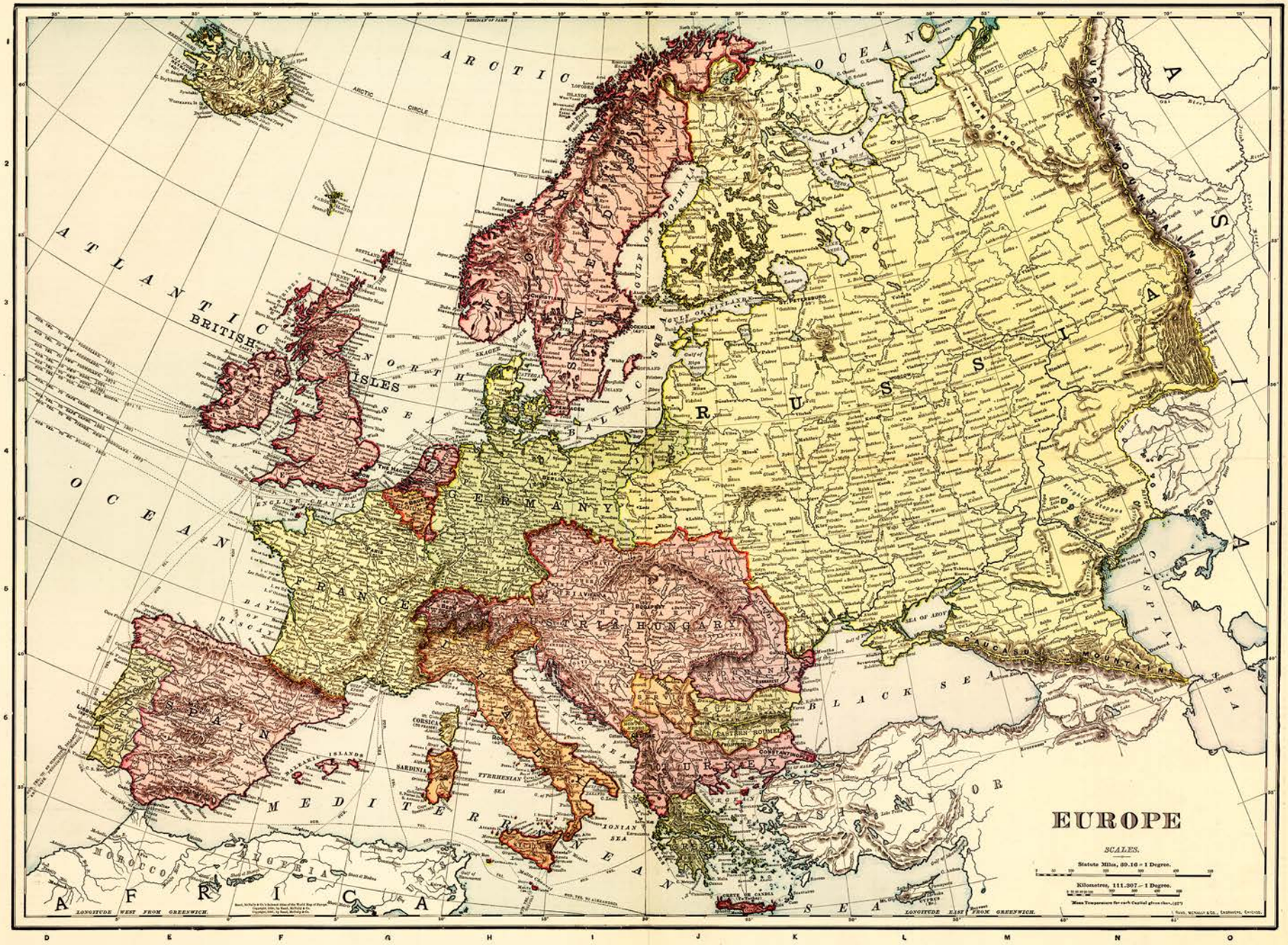

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Map of Europe in the *Rand, McNally & Company's Indexed Atlas of the World*, Chicago, Ill., 1898.

David Frishman

NAOMI BRENNER

Hebrew Critic Par Excellence: David Frishman

David Frishman was the preeminent critic of Hebrew literature in Eastern Europe during the last years of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century. He advocated passionately for the creation of a distinctly European Hebrew literature and rarely hesitated to castigate writers who failed, in his view, to develop lyricism and other aesthetic features he argued were essential. As a translator, he created Hebrew versions of many European fictional and philosophical works held in high regard, including texts by Friedrich Nietzsche, George Byron, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and others. As an editor, he wielded power at many publishing venues for Hebrew writers young and old, such as *Ha-Dor* (The Generation), *Ha-Boker* (The Morning), *Ha-Tekufah* (The Era), and the Stybel publishing house. His literary work in Hebrew and Yiddish, however, was often overshadowed by his other literary pursuits. Still, Frishman's extensive efforts as a cultural agent left a lasting mark on the development of modern Hebrew literary culture.

Born in Zgierz, near Łódź, in 1859,[1] Frishman spent time in many of the centers of Jewish culture of the time: Warsaw, Berlin, St. Petersburg, and Odessa (**fig. 1**). He started publishing poems, translations, and articles in Hebrew at a young age in a variety of Eastern European Hebrew periodicals. By the late 1880s, he was writing for the Yiddish press as well; his first Yiddish poem, *Oyfn bergl* (On the Hill), appeared in 1888. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Eastern European Yiddish newspapers such as *Yudishes Folks-Blat* (Jewish People's Newspaper), *Der Yud* (The Jew), *Der Fraynd* (The Friend), and *Haynt* (Today) were publishing his lyric

1 There is uncertainty among critics about when Frishman was born. Getzel Kressel lists 1859 in his lexicon, other lexicons suggest 1863, and Frishman himself writes in a letter he was born in 1865. See idem, Leksikon ha-sifrut ha-ivrit ba-dorot ha-aḥaronim [Lexicon of the Hebrew Literature of Recent Generations], Merhavia 1967, 668f.; Eliezer Malakhi, Igrot David Frishman. Im temunoto ve-eẓem ketav yado [Letters from David Frishman. With a Picture of Him and the Manuscript Itself], ed. by Lili Frishman, New York 1927, 7; Shalom Kramer, Frishman ha-mevaker [Frishman the Critic], Jerusalem 1984, 11.

In Their Surroundings, 21–28 | doi.org/10.13109/9783666306112.21

Fig. 1: David Frishman, undated.

poetry, stories, and feuilletons on a regular basis.[2] Frishman also took the first of many positions as editor at the daily newspaper *Ha-Yom* (Today, 1886–1888) in St. Petersburg, which allowed him to start shaping the kind of Hebrew periodical he believed his time needed. The growing press was essential to the development of Hebrew literature, as most writers began their literary careers publishing in various newspapers and periodicals. Frishman's editorial positions at Hebrew outlets and publishing houses granted him immense influence over the selection of writers and texts for publication.

Even before his rise to authority in literary circles, Frishman made a name for himself in Hebrew letters with his scathing criticism of Jewish cultural institutions, including the venerable Russian Jewish weekly *Ha-Meliẓ* (The Advocate). In 1883, for example, the young Frishman published a small pamphlet entitled *Tohu va-vohu* (Chaos), which attacked several of the most prominent Hebrew writers and critics of the time. *Ha-Meliẓ* (1860–1904) published the works of most Hebrew writers active in Russia during the second half of the nineteenth century and was an important platform for many prominent maskilim, proponents of the Jewish Enlightenment (Haskalah). By the 1880s, *Ha-Meliẓ* supported *Ḥibbat Ẓiyon* (Fondness for Zion), a pre-

2 For a detailed description of Frishman's Yiddish work, see Zalmen Reyzen, Leksikon fun der yidisher literatur, prese un filologye [Lexicon of Yiddish Literature, Press, and Philology], 4 vols., here vol. 3, Vilna 1929, col. 204–228.

Zionist nationalist movement advocating for Jews to settle in Palestine. Frishman begins his essay by dramatically narrating his shock when he received a telegram informing him of *Ha-Meliẓ*'s plan to start publishing twice a week. In elegant, biting prose, Frishman launches into an extended critique of the newspaper and some of its best-known contributors, arguing that the paper featured self-serving and derivative journalism. Attacking prominent writers such as Saul Israel Hurwitz and Yehalel (Yehuda Leib Levin), as well as Aleksander Zederbaum, the long-time editor of *Ha-Meliẓ*, Frishman ridicules what he saw as their facile imitation of European literary ideas, sardonically noting Hurwitz's confusion of Auguste Comte with Immanuel Kant. Referring to *Ha-Meliẓ*'s contributors as "frogs" who infested various periodicals, he writes, "their idioms are dreadful, the words that issue from their lips are wanting, and their entire power emanates from the noise and storm of their words that a simple man like me cannot, for the world, understand."[3] Not surprisingly, Frishman made a lot of enemies within the Hebrew literary establishment, especially since this was only one of the first of what would be many controversies provoked by his critical essays.

Frishman's *Tohu va-vohu* is often regarded as a rejection of the maskilic ideas espoused by many of these writers, as part of a broader transition from the Haskalah to a new phase called the *teḥiya*, the national revival, in the wake of Russian pogroms in the early 1880s. While Frishman's Hebrew aestheticism differs from maskilic approaches to Hebrew literature, his critique of *Ha-Meliẓ* is driven by his rejection of Zionism, a stance that came to define Frishman's writing. Iris Parush delineates two related themes that begin to emerge in texts like *Tohu va-vohu*: Frishman's belief that the creation of a national homeland was both impossible and inadvisable.[4] Frishman was deeply invested in questions of national revival, but he rejected both political and spiritual Zionism as solutions to the challenges facing Jews in the modern world. In 1899, only two years after the First Zionist Congress convened in Basel, Frishman writes in a letter to Mordecai (Marcus) Ehrenpreis: "I have never felt myself as lonely and solitary as now […]. The few friends that I had are leaving me one by one, day by day, going to one place—Zionism, and I am left alone and lonely."[5]

3 David Frishman, Kol kitve David Frishman [Collected Works of David Frishman], 9 vols., here vol. 4, ed. by Lili Frishman, Warsaw/New York 1937, 43.

4 Iris Parush, Kanon sifruti ve-ide'ologiya le'umit. Bikoret ha-sifrut shel Frishman be-hashwa'ah le-vikoret ha-sifrut shel Klozner ve-Brener [Literary Canon and National Ideology. Frishman's Literary Criticism in Comparison to Klausner's and Brenner's Literary Criticism], Jerusalem 1992, 19.

5 Cit. in Parush, Kanon sifruti ve-ide'ologiya le'umit, 27.

Despite the power Frishman maintained as an editor, he was convinced that his politics, namely his resistance to Zionism, curtailed his influence and his status in Hebrew literature.

While Frishman's harsh rejection of Zionism changed later on in his career—scholars still debate whether his poetry and essays of the time cautiously embrace Zionist ideas or if he essentially modulates his opposition[6]—he remained committed to his own national cultural vision in his numerous essays and feuilletons. From the 1880s on, Frishman argued that literature was an essential foundation for national revival. As he wrote in 1913, "All of my hopes have always been in literature—and only literature. It has been a life-saver for me, the only one that we have left … National revival begins with literary revival."[7] Belletristic literature, he argued, was the only way to rehabilitate the Jewish soul.

Frishman's goal, however, was not the creation of a particularistic, nationalistic Hebrew literature, but rather a modern, universal literature in Hebrew. His understanding of "universal" was strongly oriented toward Europe, since he regarded classical and modern European thought and literature as both inspiration and raw material for his cultural project. While he criticized contemporary writers for their shallow imitations of European literary trends, Frishman envisioned the creation of a modern Hebrew literature that was thoroughly European in its sensibilities. His focus on individual sensibilities cultivated in and through literature represents a significant contrast to the collectivist mentality that came to define twentieth-century Hebrew Zionist culture.

Frishman's strong inclination toward European literature is evident in his essays and many translations. Starting in the 1890s, after Frishman spent four years at the University of Breslau, he translated a remarkable number of literary texts into Hebrew, including German, Russian, French, and English poetry, prose and plays by Goethe, Aleksandr Pushkin, Heinrich Heine, Charles Baudelaire, Oscar Wilde, Hans Christian Andersen, Nietzsche, Shakespeare, George Eliot, and more. While these works demonstrate Frishman's supple Hebrew and stylistic command, his commentary—in prefaces to his own translations, letters, and reviews of other people's translations—provide great insight into the cultural and political work of translation. For Frishman, both the act and the product of translation were, in Danielle Drori's words, "an arena of cultural battles,"

6 Many critics have analyzed Frishman's relationship with Zionism. For example, see David Fishelov, Tirgumo shel Frishman le-"Kayin" me'et Byron, u-mashma'utaw [Frishman's Translation of "Cain" by Byron, and Its Meaning], in: Meḥkerei Yerushalayim be-sifrut ivrit / Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature 24 (2011), 125–142; Kramer, Frishman ha-mevaker, 28–32; Parush, Kanon sifruti ve-ide'ologiya le'umit, 17–32.

7 Frishman, Kol kitve David Frishman, vol. 8, 54.

in which intellectuals shaped and revealed their distinct aesthetic and ideological visions.[8] In his introduction to the Hebrew translation of George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1893), Frishman posits translation as a way of constructing a modern Hebrew subject, as he attempts to balance widespread Zionist interpretations of the novel with his own political reservations. In the preface to his translation of Byron's *Cain* (1900), he seeks to mediate between European Romanticism and Hebrew literature, calling attention to the Romantic themes that he held in high esteem, such as tragic heroes and their moral and metaphysical rebellions.[9]

These translations, in addition to Frishman's other writings, continued at a remarkable pace during and after World War I. As the founding editor of the Stybel publishing house and the highly regarded literary quarterly *Ha-Tekufah*, Frishman facilitated the publication of many translations into Hebrew and served an instrumental role in Stybel's efforts to promote the development of a cosmopolitan Hebrew culture. Under his stewardship, the press embarked on an ambitious program of translation, focusing on a list of European and world literature chosen by Frishman. Kenneth Moss argues that Frishman's editorial efforts represented a major shift from translation as a means of reeducating the Jewish reader to one of reinventing Hebrew culture as part of a pan-European literature.[10]

Frishman was not alone in his efforts to expand and transform Hebrew literature through European literary tradition. The 1890s saw confrontations between Aḥad Ha-Am and a group of younger writers over the suitability of European literary values for Jewish literature, and debates over the desirability and adequacy of Hebrew translations of European works by the Tushiyah publishing house. Frishman's rejection of Jewish particularism, however, drew a great deal of attention as it highlighted what was perceived as the radical nature of his aestheticism. In 1908, Frishman attacked Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik, who was recognized by many contemporaries as the Jewish national poet. Frishman dared to criticize Bialik's "prophetic" early-twentieth-century poems that adopted an authoritative and often wrathful prophetic voice, advising Bialik to return to his earlier lyricism.[11]

8 Danielle Drori, A Translator against Translation. David Frishman and the Centrality of Translation in Early 20th-Century Hebrew Literature and Jewish National Politics, in: PaRDeS 25 (2019), 43–56, here 44 and 52.

9 Fishelov, Tirgumo shel Frishman le-Kayin me'et Byron u-mashma'utaw, 130.

10 Kenneth B. Moss, Not *The Dybbuk* but *Don Quixote*. Translation, Deparochialization, and Nationalism in Jewish Culture, in: Benjamin Nathans / Gabriella Safran (eds.), Culture Front. Representing Jews in Eastern Europe, Philadelphia, Pa., 2008, 196–240, here 207 f.

11 Frishman, Kol kitve David Frishman, vol. 5, 170–178.

Fig. 2: David Frishman (left) with Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik (right) in conversation, drawing by Leonid Pasternak, 1921 or 1922.

But it was Frishman's second public repudiation of Bialik that demonstrated his own approach to the Jewish cultural past and future. In 1913, Bialik presented an ambitious project of cultural ingathering *(kinus)*, arguing that Jewish texts must be collected and translated into Hebrew (fig. 2). Bialik insisted that a vibrant modern Hebrew culture had to preserve the masterpieces of Jewish tradition and that "national artists" must create a new literary corpus from historical Jewish linguistic and literary reservoirs.[12] Frishman countered Bialik's project with a proposal of his own: to provide financial support for writers to produce new literary works in Hebrew and attract young readers. His plan was far less developed than Bialik's, but it represented a fundamental difference in historical perspective and cultural values. Bialik looked to the past to craft a Jewish national culture, seeking to balance European influences with Jewish particularity. Frishman found little of value in the Jewish cultural past and in historical categories more generally, arguing that Hebrew literature needed to emulate European literary traditions instead of resuscitating Jewish literary traditions. He stressed that the new generation of readers, no longer educated in the traditional heder or yeshiva, needed new literature in Hebrew that resonated with their modern sensibilities, otherwise they would abandon Hebrew for other languages. In a clear rebuke of Bialik, Frishman proclaimed, "We need not the book, but literature, not the dead library, but living creation […]. Our ancient literature is our genius. But we must show our sons not our genius […], but our strength to give birth, to create and to create no less than others do."[13]

While this sense of urgency drove Frishman's work in the last decade before his death in 1922, it is striking that his own creative efforts—in poetry and prose—have received far less attention than his criticism. Menuḥa Gilboa traces the evolution of Frishman's poetics, and argues that, by the last decades of his career, Frishman combined the Romanticism that had defined much of his writing, particularly in poetry, with expectations for realism in fiction, championing lyric pathos within a Realist literary framework.[14] Perhaps most notable in the context of his political and aesthetic views are a series of nine stories that Frishman published in Hebrew and Yiddish from 1909 onward and which appeared posthumously, in 1923, in the Hebrew collection *Ba-midbar* (In the Wilderness). Given Frishman's comments about the Jewish literary tradition, the engagement of the stories with the Hebrew Bible, specifically the Israelites' experience in the wilderness, might be surprising. In the short story published in Hebrew as *Meḥolot* and in Yiddish as *Der tants* (Dances and Dance respectively), a woman mourns the loss of her lover, rumored to have returned to Egypt, as she moves with her tribe from site to site in the desert, culminating in a frenzied scene, as the high priest creates the golden calf. The protagonist is estranged from the collective, though she ultimately capitulates to the pressures of a misguided collective will. *Sorer u-moreh* and *Der soyrer umoyre* (Rebellious Son) narrate the fate of a young man who dies standing up for the poor and downtrodden and against the corruption of the priests, blaming his murder on their hunger for power and misguided mob justice. Frishman's stories are set in biblical times and recounted with flourishes of neo-biblical language, but speak to modern sensibilities and feature searing critiques of Eastern European Jewish society. They valorize men and women who rebel against the authority of the priests and the law given at Sinai, combining a biblical facade with distinctly European concepts: Schopenhauer's idea of art as a visionary medium, Nietzsche's perspective on the supremacy of aesthetics, and Anatole France's reimagining of historical narratives as spiritual redemption.[15] The stylized desert becomes, in Frishman's lyrical prose, a space for the critique of Eastern European Jewish life and the imagination of alternative modern Jewish subjectivities.

Fig. 3: The literary journal *Ha-Tekufah*, edited by David Frishman from 1918 to 1922.

Several of these stories appeared in *Ha-Tekufah*, the literary journal Frishman edited during the last four years

12 See Ḥayim Naḥman Bialik, Ha-sefer ha-ivri [The Hebrew Book], in: idem, Kol kitve Ḥ. N. Bialik [Collected Works of Ḥ. N. Bialik], Tel Aviv 1971, 194–199; and his description of Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh (Mendele Moykher Sforim) as "the first national artist" in idem, Mendele ve-shloshet ha-krakhim [Mendele and the Three Volumes], in: ibid., 242–245.

13 Frishman, Kol kitve David Frishman, vol. 8, 58f.

14 Menuḥa Gilboa, Bein re'alizm le-romantikah. Al darko shel David Frishman bavikoret [Between Realism and Romanticism. On David Frishman's Path in Criticism], Tel Aviv 1975, 170.

15 Yaron Peleg, Orientalism and the Hebrew Imagination, Ithaca, N. Y., 2005, 44.

of his life, along with a variety of poems; new installments in his series on Hebrew literature, *Mikhtavim ḥadashim al davar ha-sifrut* (New Letters on Literature); translations of works by Rabidranath Tagore, Goethe, Heine, and Byron; and many assorted essays and reviews (fig. 3). This remarkable range of publications—just a fraction of his immense corpus—demonstrates Frishman's instrumental role in developing modern Hebrew literature and his sustained commitment to lyricism as the foundation for a culture that he argued could be both Hebrew and universal.

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LILAH NETHANEL

The Threshold of Sensibilities: David Frishman's Introduction to the Hebrew Translation of George Eliot's Novel *Daniel Deronda* (1893)

This article presents a new reading of David Frishman's 1893 introduction to his Hebrew translation of the novel *Daniel Deronda* by George Eliot. Frishman was a pivotal cultural agent of modern European Hebrew literature, which his translations most beautifully reveal as a culture caught in between, in motion, and in constant reconfiguration. He welcomed the influences of neighboring book cultures. In fact, he believed that Jewish cultural particularism could only be affirmed through the dialogue with other cultures, by means of translation and adaptation.

In what follows, I will discuss Frishman's cultural vision and concept of modern European Hebrew literature, with a focus on his early translations. Based on the introduction to his translated work *Daniel Dironda*, I will explore his conflictual position on this particular translation. The last section of the article is dedicated to Frishman's interpretation of the revival of Jewish national culture as a late "age of sensibilities."

David Frishman's Cultural Vision

The symbolic assets of modern Jewish literature are to be located beyond the borders of the cities where its authors, publishers, and readers were based. While the majority of Frishman's early Hebrew works were printed in Warsaw, his literary and critical output expresses a complex composition of cultural influences.

As a Hebrew author under the influence of a rising new Jewish subjectivity, Frishman incorporated in his works Romantic themes and narratives, the questions of revolt and tradition, alienation and origin. He experimented with a modern performative literary expression, drawing on Jewish thought and biblical themes, on the one hand, and the urban and in-

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Fig. 1: The writers David Frishman, Sholem Abramovitsh, and Yankev Dinezon (second row, third to fifth from left) together with the teachers of the Jarocziński Trade School in Łódź, 1909.

dustrialized European literary sphere, on the other. One of his early works, published in 1900, is a Hebrew translation of George Gordon Byron's play *Cain*. Byron's romantic return to the biblical ancestry of the sin is transformed by Frishman into a complex cultural gesture of restoring the biblical Hebrew language. He developed this cultural gesture further in a cycle of biblical short stories entitled *Ba-midbar* (In the Desert). A modern interpretation of the exodus of the People of Israel from the *Book of Numbers*, Frishman uses the themes of exile and return to tell a romantic legend of fear and longing, lyric perceptions, and transgressive figures, following Byron's model.[1]

Rather than an exemplary novelist or poet, Frishman was mainly a cultural agent, a translator and editor, drafting the structure and outlines of the library of modern Hebrew writings (fig. 1). As such, his work gave rise to a most intriguing Jewish particularism, which could only be established and recognized on a semi-global scale, that is, in between other national cultures, in correspondence with them and under their influence.[2]

Frishman's documented conflict with Zionism reveals the fundamental principles of his national cultural vision.[3] Significantly different from the symbolic assets of modern nationalism, Frishman's literary activity was not based on narratives but on sensibilities.[4] He envisioned the creation of a

1 David Fishelov, Tirgumo shel Frishman le-"Kayin" me'et Byron, u-mashma'utaw [Frishman's Translation of "Cain" by Byron, and Its Meaning, in: Meḥkerei Yerushalayim be-sifrut ivrit / Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature 24 (2011), 125–142.

2 The term "non-universal global," suggested by Lital Levy and Allison Schachter, remarkably describes the ground of differences sustaining modern European Hebrew literature. Idem, A Non-Universal Global. On Jewish Writing and World Literature, in: Prooftexts. A Journal of Jewish Literary History 36 (2017), no. 1–2, 1–26.

3 Iris Parush, Kanon sifruti ve-ide'ologiya le'umit. Bikoret ha-sifrut shel Frishman be-hashwa'ah le-vikoret ha-sifrut shel Klozner ve-Brener [Literary Canon and National Ideology. Frishman's Literary Criticism in Comparison to Klausner's and Brenner's Literary Criticism], Jerusalem 1992, 17–32.

4 This concept was already noted in the mid-1860s by the Hebrew critical thinker Avraham Uri Kovner. In his collection of essays entitled *Ḥeker davar* (Investigations), Kovner argues that the modern Hebrew literature in Moses Mendelssohn's time is characterized by its groundbreaking emphatic expression: "Then we first saw that the Hebrew language could render this type of sentiment—one whose origin is not in Heaven. We read things, in the Hebrew language, about love, hope, beauty, and similar feelings—things which Hebrew men did not dare speak, let alone read in books" (translated from Hebrew by Mirjam Hadar). Avraham Uri Kovner, Ḥeker davar. Ve-hu' kevuẓat ma'amarim shonim, le-ruaḥ ha-zeman bi-sefat avar [Investigations. And This Is a Set of Different Articles for the Spirit of the Time in the Hebrew Language], Warsaw 1865, 39.

modern European Hebrew literature, mainly by means of translation. Far from encouraging direct imitation—in fact, he resented the Hebrew authors of his time who facilely emulated the style of European authors—he strove to achieve a unique Hebrew performance of the European literary canon and to develop a far more complex model of cultural influence.[5] His vision was to expand the Hebrew literary expression, since literature was, in his understanding, crucial for the conception of a new modern Jewish subjectivity, the only language capable of representing the social and cultural issues of the time: alienation and banishment, the meaning of ancient cultures and the origins of culture, the quest for a modern Jewish identity.

Frishman added detailed introductions to several of his early translations in which he presented the original literary work and its author and argued for the necessity and importance of the translation. These texts are important sources from which to draw a picture of Frishman's cultural vision and notion of influence.

Frishman's Introduction to *Daniel Dironda*

First published in 1893, Frishman's translation of *Daniel Deronda* by George Eliot appeared around fifteen years after the original English version of 1876.[6] With a maze of national identities at its center, the novel recounts the revelation of Daniel Deronda's Jewish origins and reflects

5 The relation of modern Hebrew literature to non-Jewish European literature was extensively discussed by the major thinkers and critical writers of the period. The Zionist thinker Aḥad Ha-Am (Asher Zvi Ginsberg) discussed the cultural phenomenon of "imitation" in his 1893 essay *Ḥikuy ve-hitbolelut* (Imitation and Assimilation). The Hebrew scholar and literary critic Joseph Klausner also referred to this issue in his 1905 collection of essays entitled *Yahadut ve-enoshiyut. Kovez ma'amarim* (Judaism and Humanism. Collection of Articles).

6 George Eliot, Daniel Dironda, transl. by David Frishman, Warsaw 1893. The translated novel was first published in a weekly series by Aḥiasaf publishing. This editorial decision was aimed to reach a wider public. The economic calculation in this case is similar to the penny-book's model of cheap print and modest textual length. See the publisher's foreword, entitled *El ha-kor'im!* (To the Readers!), to the opening of the 1893 translated edition of the novel, i–ii. Mikhal Dekel explains the considerable delay in the publication of the Hebrew translation with the proto-Zionist views expressed in the novel: "This delay was, in part, because Eliot's nationalistic vision preceded the Zionist movement by two full decades." Idem, The Universal Jew. Masculinity, Modernity, and the Zionist Moment, Evanston, Ill., 2010, 87f.

on the decadent nationalism of the nobility in mid-nineteenth-century England. It presents two narratives: that of the English nobility, embodied in the female protagonist, Gwendolen Harleth, and of the Jewish minority, whose increasing embrace of modern nationalism is viewed through the eyes of Daniel Deronda (fig. 2).[7]

The publication of the novel's Hebrew translation followed the rise of the Zionist movement and was received by the public as a proto-Zionist literary work. Frishman shortened the first half of the original text, beginning with Gwendolen's early life and ending with her romance and engagement to the wealthy Henleigh Mallinger Grandcourt.[8] As a result, the translation is marked by a much greater focus on the figure of Daniel Deronda and his quest for answers about his Jewish identity.

Far from a mere transmission of the original material, the Hebrew translation constitutes a cultural performance, radically altering the novel's narrative center and thematic scope. This cultural performance was encouraged by political tendencies within both, the Hebrew literary field, above all editors and publishing houses, as well as the public, i. e. potential readers. The initial publisher of the translation, Aḥiasaf in Warsaw, was in fact a Zionist institution, founded by Ben-Avigdor (Abraham Leib Shalkovich), himself a novelist and literary agent.[9]

In the publisher's foreword of the 1893 edition, the Zionist perspective is made explicit (fig. 3). It is presented as primary justification for the publication of the Hebrew translation: "Since the novel is distinguished, marvelous and most of its content is dedicated to the Jewish people, their merits and aspirations […], who would refuse to admit that this admirable book should be translated into Hebrew for the Hebrew readership?"[10]

7 Marc E. Wohlfarth, Daniel Deronda and the Politics of Nationalism, in: Nineteenth Century Literature 53 (1998), no. 2, 188–210.

8 The Hebrew version of the novel followed an editorial decision opposite to the one suggested by the English literary critic F. R. Leavis. Leavis suggested to "extricate" Gwendolen's plot "for separate publication." According to him, such a novel, entitled "Gwendolen Harleth," "would be a self-sufficient and very substantial whole" (144). Concerning Deronda, the critic claimed, "As for the bad part of Daniel Deronda, there is nothing to do but cut it away" (143). Leavis considered the tragic figure of Gwendolen to be Eliot's important achievement in the novel. Idem, The Great Tradition. George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, London 2008 (first publ. 1948).

9 On the Jewish literary infrastructure in late nineteenth-century Warsaw, see Nathan Cohen, Distributing Knowledge. Warsaw as a Center of Jewish Publishing, 1850–1914, in: Glenn Dynner / François Guesnet (eds.), Warsaw. The Jewish Metropolis. Essays in Honor of the 75th Birthday of Professor Antony Polonsky, Leiden 2015, 180–206. On the literary agency of Ben-Avigdor and his enterprises in Warsaw, see Shachar Pinsker, Warsaw in Hebrew Literature 1880–1920. New Perspectives, in: Studia Judaica 18 (2015), no. 1, 105–137.

10 El ha-kor'im!, i. All Hebrew passages quoted in this article were translated by Mirjam Hadar, unless indicated otherwise.

Fig. 2: Gwendolen Harleth at the roulette table.

The author indicates that "most of the novel" is dedicated to unique traits and hopes of the People of Israel. This perception is reinforced in the translated version by omitting much of the story's first part and focusing on its second "Jewish" part. Frishman's introduction follows and underpins the publisher's foreword, stressing the political leaning of the novel toward Jewish national revival. As if to give his formal consent to the Zionist


דניאל דירונדה

ספור

כתוב אנגלית ביד

יארג עליוט.

נעתק לעברית על ידי

דוד פרישמאנן.

חלק ראשון

הוצאת „אחיאסף"

ווארשא

בדפוס האחים שולדבערג, הויקא № 1

שנת תרנ"ג לפ"ק

ДАНІЭЛЬ ДЕРОНДО

романъ Джорджъ Эліота.

Переводъ Д. Фришмана

Часть I.

ВАРШАВА

Типографія Братьевъ Шульдберггъ Дикая № 1.

1893.

Fig. 3: Title page of the Hebrew translation of *Daniel Deronda*.

interpretation, Frishman writes: "Upon its publication, critics said about this book that ever since Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*, nothing like it had been written about the Jewish people [the People of Israel] and their faith, their tribulations and futures, and everything else concerning it, as well as its legacy."[11]

But in the following sentence, Frishman expresses his reservations about the political role contributed to the novel: "And this is not merely a book about philosophy, as the book Lessing wrote: It will capture the reader's interest not only because of its scholarship, but through the many imaginative scenes the narrative includes."[12] Frishman's cultural aspiration in translating *Daniel Deronda* into Hebrew differs from its presumed political affinity with the Jewish readership: Eliot's philosemitic approach and her support of the rising Jewish nationalism. By pointing at the importance of "the story which allures the reader's heart," Frishman suggests that the literary condition of the national revival belongs to the emotive order rather than the rational or "philosophical" one.[13] Looking at the translated version, it seems that Frishman worked against this argument, by consenting to omit many of the "attractive images" the novel contains. In the following paragraph from the introduction, he discusses this editorial decision (figs. 4 and 5):

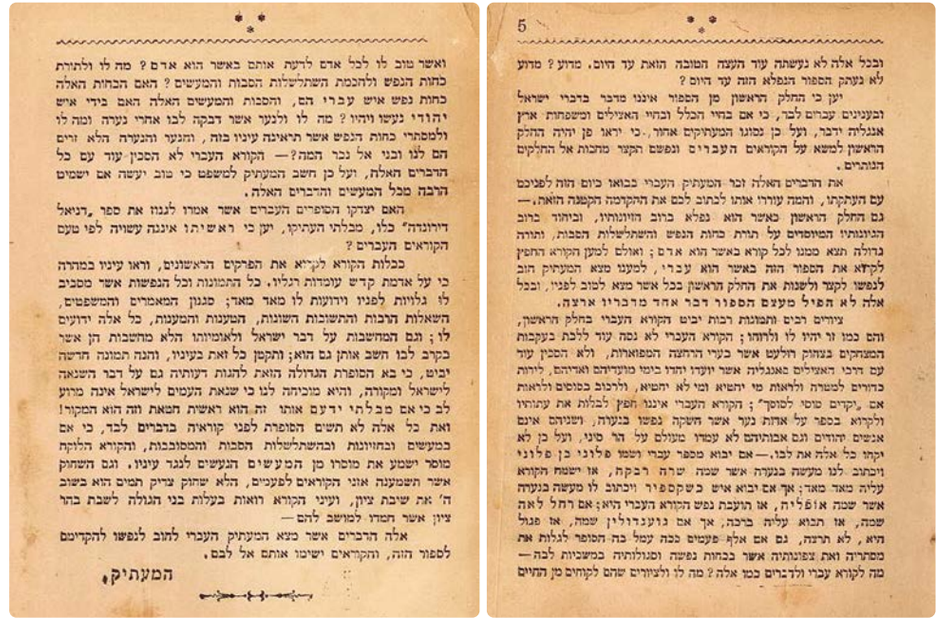
> "Why has this wonderful story not been translated until now? It is because the first part of the story does not deal at all with Jewish and Hebrew matters only, but with life in general and that of the English aristocracy and their families. And so the translators—fearing that this first part would be taxing for the Hebrew readership and cause them to lose patience, while waiting for the other parts—refrained. This was on the mind of the present Hebrew translator as he offers you his translation, and this is what moved him to write this short introduction. The [novel's] first part, [like the rest] too, by means of its rich imagery, and especially its many reflections based on psychology and causality, extends much wisdom to any reader, any human. But for any reader who wishes to read this novel as a Hebrew, the translator felt obliged to adjust and abridge this first part."[14]

11 Eliot, Daniel Dironda, 3.

12 Eliot, Daniel Dironda, 3.

13 This is in fact the central claim of Frishman as a critical writer. Iris Parush already noted that Frishman's perception of the national revival culture is based upon a revival of sensibilities. Idem, Kanon sifruti ve-ide'ologiya le'umit, 144.

The abridged translation placed Frishman in a conflictual position. In the thriving Hebrew book culture of late nineteenth-century Warsaw—with the translation of contemporary European literature and the popularization of modern Hebrew reading—the fundamental question of Jewish modernization resonated once more: What was the designation of Jewish particularism and how did it relate to the European idea of universalism? Frishman's distinction between the reader as a human being and as a national "Hebrew" evoked a remotely similar notion held by maskilic author Naphtali Herz Wessely (1725–1805). In Wessely's 1782 manifest *Divre shalom ve-emet* (Words of Peace and Truth), he articulated the rise of Jewish modernity by distinguishing between secular and religious knowledge. This distinction was further elaborated by Eastern European



Figs. 4 and 5: Fragment of David Frishman's preface to *Daniel Dironda*.

14 Eliot, Daniel Dironda, 5.

Jewish thinkers throughout the nineteenth century, until it reached a significant culmination in the national revival period. By conjuring a universal image of the reader, "the reader as a human being," Frishman leads the discussion beyond the maze of national identities, to the question of Jewish subjectivity. To him, this was the hallmark of particularism.

However, in the conclusion of the paragraph, Frishman admits that his "national" obligation toward the Hebrew reader had led him to shorten the novel's first part. Frishman's apparent contradiction could be partly explained by David Damrosch's theory of translations and modern national literatures, according to which nationalism should be affirmed through the symbolic expansion of the national language by embedding other national literatures, cultural traditions, and poetic sensibilities.[15] The translation is not merely a source of outside inspiration: It is destined for the representation of the modern Jewish self.

In the following paragraph, Frishman carefully elaborates on the apparatus of sensibilities represented in the first part of the novel. He does so only implicitly, by marking these omitted sections as "foreign" to the Hebrew reader's expectations:

> "The Hebrew reader will encounter many images and scenes in the first part that will be foreign to him and his sensibilities. The Hebrew reader has not yet tried to follow the footsteps of those who play the game of roulette in splendid holiday resorts; nor is he acquainted with how the English aristocracy spend their holidays together; shoot at targets in order to see who hits the mark and who does not; ride on horseback in order to see whether 'my horse will arrive before yours.' The Hebrew reader does not want to spend his time reading about a young man who has lost his heart to a girl when neither of them is Jewish, and indeed, neither of their forefathers attended the events on Mount Sinai, so that none of this will touch their hearts. If some Hebrew writer, say Ploni Ben-Ploni [a John Doe], writes a tale about a lass called Sarah-Rivkah, the reader will be delighted. But when an author called Shakespeare decides to write about a young woman named Ophelia, the Jewish soul is put off. She would be blessed if her name were Rahel-Leah, but if it is Gwendolen it is repulsive and will not please, even if the author had tried a thousand times to describe the mysteries and riddles of her soul and the most beautiful qualities of her heart."[16]

15 David Damrosch, Translations and National Literature, in: Sandra Bermann / Catherine Porter (eds.), A Companion to Translation Studies, Chichester et al. 2014, 349–360, here 351.

16 Eliot, Daniel Dironda, 5f.

This description of the Hebrew reader is eccentric and parodic. Frishman chose to illustrate the reader's expectations by distinguishing between the Jewish and non-Jewish names of female protagonists. He contrasts the generic names Sarah-Rivkah or Rahel-Leah—the biblical "mothers" of the Jewish nation—with Shakespeare's Ophelia and Eliot's Gwendolen, representing the female legacy of English literature. This distinction meant to establish a set of cultural segregations between the biblical and the modern, the Jewish community and the gentile society, the identification of the self and the representation of others. Frishman sought subjectivity at the margins of the imposing discourse of identities—not in Eliot's London but in Ben-Avigdor's Hebrew Warsaw; not through the gender-identified epic narratives of emigration and colonialism, but by revealing "the inner soul" through the feminine legacy of literature.

As Mikhal Dekel has already pointed out, by omitting Gwendolen's romantic storyline, Frishman "sacrificed aesthetic achievements for a national aim," as the latter admits himself.[17] And indeed, by the end of the nineteenth century, the modernization of Hebrew book culture faced a new phase of politization following a series of developments: the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 and increasing politization of Russian Jewry; the violent attacks by civilians against the Jewish population in the southern regions of the Russian Empire and its coverage in the Jewish press; the Dreyfus affair in France and Émile Zola's newspaper article *J'Accuse …!*, which incorporated the modern principle of publicly imposing authorship; the explicit national turn of major outlets of the Hebrew press and authors, such as notably the daily *Ha-Meliẓ*; and finally, the post-1881 writings of prominent Jewish authors, among them Yehuda Leib Gordon, Aḥad Ha-Am, and Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh. Frishman's early translations, published during the 1890s, are all inscribed in that political context. Furthermore, most potential Hebrew readers of the novel were Eastern European Jews, often geographically and culturally foreign to the Western European lifestyle, and to some extent also to Western European Jewry.

The decision to exclude many of the "non-Jewish" chapters of Eliot's novel was part of Frishman's ongoing negotiation with the modern Hebrew readership. Only a decade earlier, in 1883, he had published a pamphlet entitled *Tohu va-vohu*, lambasting the Hebrew journal *Ha-Meliẓ*. Frishman accused the editors of misguiding its Hebrew readers and preventing them from acquiring a modern literacy. In the following years, he also

17 Dekel, The Universal Jew, 88.

challenged Jewish national particularism and Zionist thought.[18] Although his choice to translate Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* served Zionist ideology, it seems that his introduction to the novel is meant to be read "beyond" the contemporary Hebrew reader to whom it is addressed. The introduction is the only textual realm permitting a detailed description of the omitted "non-Jewish" parts of the novel. While the translation itself was shortened in order to adapt the plot to the political expectations of the Hebrew readership, the introduction expresses a critical point of view. This is where Frishman was able to convey his reservations about his own editorial decision.

The Threshold of Sensibilities

Frishman's continuing textual negotiation with the Hebrew reader is expressed in the following sentences of his introduction to Eliot's novel, where he poses a series of questions:

> "What can such things mean to the Hebrew reader? What has he got to do with these scenes from life, which are good for each and every human being as such? What business does he have with psychology or with causality or ethics? Are these the psychological forces driving the Hebrew man, and were these actions committed by a Jewish man? Does he care about a boy whose heart attached itself to a girl, and about the mysteries of the soul he will witness there, while the boy and the girl are strangers to us, after all, and foreign. The Hebrew reader has not yet been acquainted with all this, and therefore the translator saw it right to omit many of these acts and words."[19]

Although addressed to the Hebrew reader, the questions are all formulated in the third person. Their rhetorical function is to place Frishman's criticism beyond the present cultural situation and beyond the historical conditions of modern Hebrew literacy. This form of address appears again in Frishman's introduction to his Hebrew translation of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales, first published in 1896:

> "But as for the Sons of Israel—will they understand who Andersen is and what he might mean for them? It would be easy to tell them the following: Look, Andersen's fairy tales were translated into over forty languages. All the nations of Europe, and many Asian and African communities have translated these wonderful stories into their languages!"[20]

Frishman reveals his thoughts to an ideal reader, allegedly freed from the constraints of national identity. This figure appears in several of Frishman's early writings. Besides the introductions to Eliot's and Andersen's translations, it is also the addressee of Frishman's 1890s critical essays *Mikhtavim al devar ha-sifrut* (Letters on Literature), this time represented by a female person. The ideal reader has a defined role in Frishman's cultural vision as it was developed during the late nineteenth century. He or she differs from the modern Hebrew reader in their literary education and aesthetic inclinations. As a representation of the universal reader—"the reader as a human being"—he or she opposes the national Hebrew as well as the English reader mentioned in the introduction to *Daniel Dironda*. By soliciting this ideal universal reader, Frishman breaks through the historical and political conditions of modern Hebrew reading and opens the gate to the threshold of modern sensibilities. On this ground, Frishman argues in the introduction to Andersen's fairy tales for the lyric lesson of literature. He considers the representation of sensitivity essential to the Jewish national and cultural revival far more than the dramatic representation of the epic:

> "I myself recollect how my most ardent wish was that the Sons of Israel should be given plenty of lyrical poems, an idea I expressed in articles more than once. I argued that only this would provide the Sons and Daughters of Israel with the dew of revival, tenderness and subtlety, pleasure and comfort. Maybe in this way we would manage to smooth out their twisted hearts, and perhaps remove their burdensome mood, the dryness of their soul and their blunted heart, as these [poems] would act to give them some added spirit."[21]

As in the case of Eliot's novel, Frishman does not simply intend to integrate the translated literary work into the modern Hebrew reading circle, but to reconstruct it as a genuine part of the Hebrew literary imagination. For the period of Jewish national revival, his work represents a precise contribution to the Jewish nation-building project: Frishman suggests an alternative Hebrew cultural performance of European literature, turning from the epic

18 See Iris Parush's extensive study on Frishman's critical writings. Idem, Kanon sifruti ve-ide'ologiya le'umit.
19 Eliot, Daniel Dironda, 6.
20 H. Andersen, Hagadot ve-sipurim [Tales and Stories], transl. by David Frishman, Warsaw 1896, iii. This edition was printed by Alexander Ziskind Cohen.
21 Andersen, Hagadot ve-sipurim, iii.

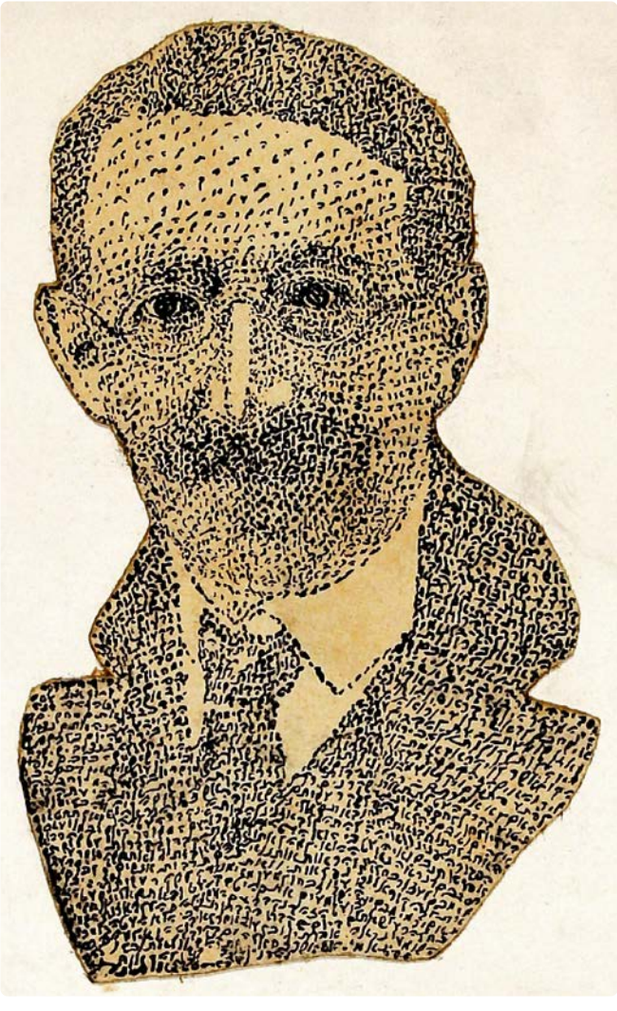


Fig. 6: Portrait of David Frishman by N. Kaselovitsh, consisting of the words of one of the writer's poems.

tales of origins and territories to the introverted construction of modern subjectivity (**fig. 6**). The core of modern Hebrew literary revival lays in the sentimental education, apprehended as much from the European Romantic themes of revolt and wandering as from later modernist urban sensibilities: attraction and repulsion, beauty and ugliness, desire and indifference.[22] Besides the adaptation of narratives and themes, Frishman's work builds on emotive expressions inspired by major national European cultures.

This conclusion contributes to our understanding of modern Hebrew literary revival as post-Romantic Jewish "age of sensibility": the legacy of intensities, inclinations, and aesthetic perceptions is the ideal source of cultural influence. This ideal source—a non-national universal one—precedes the conflictual maze of national identities, only to be later reintroduced into the national Hebrew literature through a cultural performance expressing its particularity.

22 The influence of romantic themes in European literature on Jewish sexual and sentimental conventions was studied by Naomi Seidman. Idem, The Marriage Plot. Or, How Jews Fell in Love with Love, and with Literature, Stanford, Calif., 2016.

Frishman's vision of modern European Hebrew literature is explained in the following paragraph, taken from his introduction to a collection of poems by Aleksandr Pushkin:

> "Gabirol and Spinoza were born from the womb of Judean women, Shakespeare and Newton were sons of English women, Goethe and Helmholtz were the cherished children of Ashkenaz [Germany], Copernic and Mickiewicz were beloved among the Poles—each and every nation takes just pride in the best of its children because they are the nation's offspring. Yet the virtue and spiritual joy that these gifted people brought down from heaven through their work, this virtue and joy are the legacy of the whole of humanity. Though these great people are the sons of their nations and homeland in the flesh, in spirit they are brothers to all who were created in the image of God, from the one end of heaven unto the other."[23]

The biblical expression "from the one end of heaven unto the other" is addressed to the People of Israel before their return from exile to the Promised Land. It refers to the divine presence, which is primordial to the historical time and space, indicating the permanent sovereignty of the divine law. Frishman borrows this expression in order to define the ideal sphere of culture, located beyond territorial boundaries and beyond the historical age of nationalism.

European Hebrew literature is, thus, a construct holding an ideal universalism—the figure of "the reader as a human being"—together with a cultural performance of national particularism, that is the Hebrew translation as a unique version of the original. In this construct, Frishman's cultural project aimed for a change of modalities and not of actions or narratives. It aimed at creating an emotive expression, which would inherit the rational discourse and reading practices of modern European Jewry: Passion instead of argumentation, impulse instead of reasoning, free evocation instead of savant quotation, eclectic and autodidactic desire for knowledge instead of instructed transmission.

23 Aleksandr Pushkin, Mi-shire Pushkin [Selected Poems by Pushkin], transl. by David Frishman, St. Petersburg 1899, ii.

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Naomi Seidman, The Marriage Plot. Or, How Jews Fell in Love with Love, and with Literature, Stanford, Calif., 2016.

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Uri Nissan Gnessin

DEKEL SHAY SCHORY

The Shadows of Death: Uri Nissan Gnessin

One day after the hundredth anniversary of his passing away, a small group of Hebrew literary scholars from Israel, the United States, and Poland gathered around Uri Nissan Gnessin's grave at the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw (**fig. 1**): "We stood excited, snowflakes and freezing wind around us. We said Kaddish and read from *Eẓel*," wrote Avner Holtzman about this moment. And as the group kept strolling down the streets of what used to be Jewish Warsaw, the physical absence of Gnessin only emphasized his strong presence in Hebrew literature and in the hearts of his readers and researchers.[1]

Fig. 1: Uri Nissan Gnessin's tombstone in Warsaw.

Uri Nissan Gnessin, a characteristic Eastern European Hebrew writer of the fin de siècle, was born in 1879 in Starodub, in the Russian Empire, to a Hasidic family. His father, Yehoshua Natan, was the

1 The memorial service was part of a conference organized by the University of Warsaw and the Tel Aviv University in 2013. See Avner Holtzman, Man'ginat ha-mavet shel Uri Nisan Gnesin [Uri Nissan Gnessin's Death Melody], in: Haaretz, 27 March 2013, <https://www.haaretz.co.il/literature/.premium-1.1975272> (1 July 2022).

In Their Surroundings, 45–53 | doi.org/10.13109/9783666306112.45

ГАБИМА едет в Петроград за новыми лаврами.

ТЕАТР

Желаем успехов этому театральнейшему театру.

Зауряд-спектакли.

театр ГАБИМА в Москве.

М. А. Эпштейн, артистка театра Габима.

Fig. 2: Article *Theater "Habimah" in Moscow* in a Russian journal with a picture of Uri Nissan Gnessin's brother Menahem, co-founder of Hebrew theater (first on the left).

dean of a yeshiva in Pochep, and his brother, Menahem (1882–1951), would be among the founders of Hebrew theater in the Land of Israel (fig. 2). Gnessin was engaged in literary work from his adolescent years onward. During his studies in Pochep, where he attended his father's yeshiva, he made the acquaintance of Yosef Ḥayyim Brenner (Gnessin was fifteen and Brenner thirteen at the time). Together, they edited a handwritten daily

student newspaper entitled *Ha-Kof* (The Monkey),[2] a precursor of literary collaborations to come.

The Uprooted Protagonist: Life and the Work of Literature

"In a generation of Hebrew authors in whose collective biography wandering was a basic component," writes Avner Holtzman, "Gnessin is the most frequent flyer of all."[3] Gnessin was approximately eighteen when he first ventured from his hometown of Pochep to Warsaw, the greatest Jewish metropolis of the time, to find his place in the literary world. From there, he visited other cities in the expanse of Eastern Europe, such as Kyiv, Vilna, and Gomel'. Over the years, he also spent several months in the Land of Israel and London (1907–1908). He returned to Warsaw in late 1912, in the final stages of the heart disease from which he had suffered all his life. He died at the age of 34 and was buried in the Jewish cemetery on Gęsia Street.

Warsaw was a bustling literary nexus, home to printshops, publishing houses, and newspaper headquarters, as well as Ben-Avigdor (Abraham Leib Shalkovich), Nahum Sokolow, David Frishman, Yeruḥam Fishel Lachower, Hillel Tseytlin, and other friends and supporters of Gnessin. Upon his arrival in Warsaw, he began publishing on the city's literary platforms. His first article appeared in *Ha-Meliẓ* (The Advocate), followed by poems and translations in *Ha-Ẓefirah* (The Dawn) and *Ha-Dor* (The Generation). He made a meager living doing translation work for Tushiya (Wisdom) publishing house, and in 1906, together with Shimon Bikhovski, he founded Niseyonot (Attempts), a publishing house for original and translated Hebrew literature, including Gnessin's own novella *Beintayim* (Meanwhile) (fig. 3).

Gnessin's life reads like the classic biography of other young Jews in Eastern Europe of his time:[4] a childhood spent in a traditional, observant family; leaving home at a young age to obtain an education or earn a living; peregrinations around the big cities of Europe; excitement for, and involve-

2 Michael Gluzman, "Te'udati–ha-pirekus." He'arot aḥadot al sig'nono ha-me'uḥar shel Gnesin ["My Diploma—the Adornment." Some Remarks on Gnessin's Late Style], in: Ot. A Journal of Literary Criticism and Theory 5 (2015), 5–29, here 8.

3 Avner Holtzman, Uri Nisan Gnesin be-Varshah. Taḥana ri'shona ve-taḥana aḥarona [Uri Nissan Gnessin in Warsaw. A First and Last Stop], in: Gal-Ed. On the History and Culture of Polish Jewry 24 (2015), 15–26, here 15.

4 Dan Miron, Bodedim be-mo'adam. Li-de'yokanah shel ha-republikah ha-sifrutit ha-ivrit be-teḥilat ha-me'ah ha-esrim [When Loners Come Together. A Portrait of Hebrew Literature at the Turn of the Twentieth Century], Tel Aviv 1987.

Fig. 3: From left to right: The Pochep-born journalist Shimon Bikhovski, Uri Nissan Gnessin, and the poet Yitzhak Alterman, 1907/08.

ment in, the Varsovian literary center; a back and forth between other centers of Hebrew literature; connections to contemporary authors and other literary figures. Gershon Shofman, for example, met Gnessin in Gomel', while they were both young authors, and described in great warmth their encounter.[5]

Of all Gnessin's companions in the literary world, particularly salient is the association with, and then dissociation from, Brenner. Their relationship has been debated at length in scholarly literature, but it is clear that they were close friends from their teenage years. It is clear, as well, that Gnessin helped Brenner edit *Ha-Me'orer* (The Awakener) in London in 1907, and that they then became thoroughly alienated. In retrospect, Brenner reminisced about his relationship with Gnessin: "There was love, there was—without any doubt. Esteem? That perhaps was not so strong and deep, especially after we both fell into what is called 'life.'"[6]

Despite his diverse literary activity, Gnessin is known mainly for his prose. He left an oeuvre of limited scope—just eleven stories and novellas. Yet, his unique poetic style and worldview, together with the fact that he lived a brief life and died before his time, have made him a mythic figure still unforgettable more than a century after his death.

5 G. Shofman, Uri Nisan Gnesin, in: Kol kitve G. Shofman [The Collected Works of G. Shofman], 5 vols., here vol. 4, Tel Aviv 1960, 259. Gershon Shofman (1880–1972) was a Hebrew author. His first book was published in 1902 in Warsaw. Although he wrote in Hebrew in a German-speaking environment for twenty-five years, a first translation from his work into German appeared only recently: Gerschon Schoffmann, Nicht für immer. Erzählungen, transl. by Ruth Achlama, Graz/Vienna 2017.

6 Yosef Ḥayim Brenner, Uri-Nisan (milim aḥadot) [Uri-Nisan (A Few Words)], in: Project Ben-Yehuda, Complete Collection of Uri Nissan Gnessin's Works, <https://benyehuda.org/read/601> (1 July 2022).

Literary Works

Gnessin's first book, *Ẓilele ha-ḥayim* (Shadows of Life), part of a Hebrew library series published by Ben-Avigdor's Tushiya, appeared in 1904, when the author was in his early twenties. The collection contained three short stories, *Genya* (Zhenya), *Ma'ase be-Otelo* (The Story of Othello), and *Shemu'el ben Shemu'el* (Shemu'el, Son of Shemu'el), that hewed close to the publisher's realism and naturalism. The stories have been taken by critics as a single piece. Conspicuous in them all, as for instance described by Dan Miron, is "the twisted and perverted Eros."[7]

In the same year, Gnessin completed his story *Ba-bait sab'a* (In Grandfather's House). He sent it to Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik, the editor of *Ha-Shiloaḥ* (The Sending), who rejected the piece several months later. The story describes a single evening in the life of Shemu'el, who is experiencing a confusing period of maturation in general and sexual maturation in particular. In the story, he faces his strict, devout grandfather, who forbids him to submit to his sexuality. Gnessin was deeply hurt by the rejection of the story, and declined to send it to other platforms or even to show it to friends. It was published only posthumously, in 1921.[8]

Forming the core of Gnessin's oeuvre are his four long novellas: *Ha-ẓidah* (Sideways, 1905), *Beintayim* (1906), *Be-terem* (Before, 1909), and *Eẓel* (Besides, 1913). Prominent in these is Gnessin's poetic singularity, first and foremost in his language, and his intensive use of free indirect speech. Michael Gluzman has claimed that the plots of Gnessin's later stories are slower and dismantled until they seem undirected or lacking purpose. The absence of purpose is not only a mental situation but is also disintegrating the syntax of the sentences. The absence of purpose also creates a shocking affect, *pirekus* (convulsion), in particular in stories like *Eẓel* on the threshold of death.[9]

As Josef Even has argued, "Gnessin's main inventory of scenery is quite uniform and not particularly varied. In nearly all of his stories, there emerge similar, repetitive details drawn from the childhood experience of a person in an Eastern European town and its characteristic land-

7 Dan Miron, Ḥaḥim be'apo shel ha-neẓaḥ. Yiẓirato shel Uri Nisan Gnesin [Posterity Hooked. The Travail and Achievement of Uri Nissan Gnessin], Jerusalem 1997, 31.

8 Dana Olmert has identified a link between the young Shemu'el's castration anxiety and the fear of rejection that Gnessin himself felt toward the authority figure of Bialik, and this may be why he chose to put the work aside. Dana Olmert, Mah hitgalah le-Gnesin ba-bait sab'a? [What Did Gnessin Come to Discover in "Ba-bait sab'a" (In Grandfather's House)?], in: Ot. A Journal of Literary Criticism and Theory 5 (2015), 93–108.

9 Gluzman, "Te'udati–ha-pirekus."

scapes."[10] Indeed, one can find in almost every story the forests, the fog, and the rain.

A central focus of the novellas is the exposition of the leading characters' psychology and the revelation of the protagonist's thoughts as a matter of utmost importance—features that inhibit in-depth development of the plot, secondary characters, and background. As Eyal Bassan has demonstrated convincingly, the weather is very intense in Gnessin's stories, from the narrators' and characters' perspective. One can sense a tendency to reflect the weather as a field saturated in sensational richness. It can be noticed at the opening of *Ba-ganim* (In the Gardens), in the detailed description of the chill morning sky becoming warmer and stifling as the sun comes out.[11]

Although Gnessin endeavors in his early works to depict landscapes, he also chooses to ensoul nature *(Durchseelung)*, and to give emotive descriptions to objects. Thus he "vigorously manipulates nature so as to mold with it the stream of experiences of the protagonist who is present in that scenery […] and turns it into a fundamental aspect of his inner life."[12] Gnessin's portrayals of scenery, described by Brenner as "symbolic realism," serve as an efficient mechanism for bringing the objects closer to the person observing them and to that person's psychological needs.

As Natasha Gordinsky describes in her article in this volume, the publication of Gnessin's novella *Ha-ẓidah* in 1905 marked the turning point in the literary attention that he received. Unlike Gnessin's other works, *Ha-ẓidah* possesses, at least chronologically, the scope of a novel, and it plumbs greater psychological depths. The plot extends across the seasons of three years in the life of the protagonist, Naḥum Ḥagzar. Although at the outset of the story, Ḥagzar is a young man who is certain of his future, according to Miron, he gradually descends "into slackness of life and idle tranquility due to his inertness, reflected in the dreariness of the small city."[13] Ḥagzar is an author, a common feature in Hebrew fiction of the early twentieth century. Furthermore, "Ḥagzar's literary pretensions are an expression of his aspiration to impose order and discipline on his life, and they therefore become his test, trial, and sentence."[14]

10 Josef Even, Temunot ha-nof be-siporaw shel U. N. Gnesin [Landscape Images in the Stories of U. N. Gnessin], in: Dan Miron / Dan Laor (eds.), Uri Nisan Gnesin. Meḥkarim ve-te'udot [Uri Nissan Gnessin. Studies and Documents], Jerusalem 1986, 42–59, here 44.

11 Eyal Bassan is referring in his discussion to the affect theory, that places its focus on sensations rather than emotions. See idem, Mezeg ha-awir eẓel Gnesin, o ha-afekt shel ha-sigenun [The Weather in Gnessin, or the Affect of Style], in: Ot. A Journal of Literary Criticism and Theory 5 (2015), 31–51.

12 Bassan, Mezeg ha-awir eẓel Gnesin, o ha-afekt shel ha-sig'nun, 58.

13 Miron, Ḥaḥim be'apo shel ha-neẓaḥ, 145.

14 Miron, Ḥaḥim be'apo shel ha-neẓaḥ, 147.

The protagonist of *Beintayim* is facing a limbic situation in every aspect of his life. Naftali Berger (and note, *nif'tal* can be translated as twisted or complexed) is a private tutor of two young teenagers in a provincial town. His life seems boring, filthy, and meaningless. The story emphasizes sensory description of Naftali's existentialist thoughts and confronts him with his "Devil's advocate,"[15] David Ratner, who believes suicide is the only possible way.

Be-terem, published as a serial from 1909 to 1910, describes the return of Uriel Efrat, the uprooted son, to his parents' home in the town. He returns there from a pursuit of pleasure in Kyiv, where he lived with his "matron," Irena Vasil'evna. Chapter after chapter, the book follows the stops along Uriel's journey back to "the oaks of his nativity." Most commentators have seen the book as using the model of the return home—here, an unsuccessful return. Uriel arrives at his parents' home at a late hour of the night, spends a short time with them, and leaves the house early the next morning only to drift about, not returning to the house for eight days. It is clear that Uriel, more than a returnee, is a drifter. For him, the house is merely a stop on a journey—a significant stop, to be sure, yet merely a stop. Poetically, it was in this story that Gnessin apparently first used an internal monologue reflecting the stream of consciousness of his protagonist. According to Eyal Bassan, one can find in this story a "restless strangeness" that forms a surprising movement. He interprets this movement as a nomadic movement, deterritorialization, as opposed to the literature of the literary group Tlushim (The Uprooted), whose motivation is reterritorialization. Thus, the restless wandering is at the center, and not the movement of an (unsuccessful) return home.[16]

Eẓel was completed in 1912 but published only in 1913, after the death of the author. For this reason, it is difficult not to see within it Gnessin's own efforts to come to terms with his impending death. This is the story of Efraim Margalit, a brilliant intellectual who suffers greatly from a serious disease, as he thinks back to all the young women who have pined for his love. Across the chapters of the story, there is a progression of recollections, his stream of consciousness, and flashes of memory, interspersed with depictions of nature and of pain. In the introduction, Efraim arrives in the rural area outside the town, where he meticulously scrutinizes the nature around him, even as his physical pain sporadically rises to consciousness. A powerful question posed by the story is whether the creation of a great

15 Dan Miron, Madu'a Gnesin? Shlosha iyunim [Why Gnessin? Three Studies], Jerusalem 2014, 57–64.

16 Eyal Bassan, Elef ha-mishurim shel Uri Nisan Gnesin [The Thousand Plateaus of Uri Nissan Gnessin], in: Ot. A Journal of Literary Criticism and Theory 2 (2012), 55–89.

literary work can give its creator some degree of immortality—a question that naturally cannot be uncoupled from Gnessin himself.[17]

The literary career of Uri Nissan Gnessin spanned thirteen short years, from his arrival in 1900 on the Hebrew literary scene in Warsaw to his death in 1913 in the same city. Not long after he came to Warsaw, Gnessin wrote in a literary critique that, in his view, "the purpose of literature lies in the needs of the present, and its function is to grapple with the hardships of a bewildered generation and to show it a way forward." As the contemporary reader of Gnessin's work knows, it can also be relevant after more than a hundred years.

Translated from the Hebrew by David B. Greenberg

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Uri Nissan Gnessin, Beside and Other Stories, with an introduction by Rachel Albeck-Gidron, New Milford, Conn., 2005.

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17 Holtzman, Uri Nisan Gnesin be-Varshah.

Author

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NATASHA GORDINSKY

Staging Provincial Poetics: A Close Reading of Uri Nissan Gnessin's *Ha-ẓidah* (Sideways, 1905)

Like thousands of other young Jewish men of his generation from Eastern Europe, Uri Nissan Gnessin (1879–1913) was an autodidact. He constantly sought and absorbed new knowledge and developed proficiency in three European languages, Russian, German, and French, translating from all of them into Hebrew, his second and literary language (**fig. 1**). The first volume of Gnessin's short stories appeared in 1904 in Warsaw. Yet, it was not until the publication of his novella *Ha-ẓidah* (Sideways), edited by David Frishman, in the prestigious Hebrew literary monthly *Ha-Zman* (The Time), that Gnessin was discovered as a wholly unique and innovative voice in the evolving modernist Hebrew republic of letters.

Decades after Gnessin's untimely death at the age of 33, prominent writers from different generations reflected on their enchantment with Gnessin's highly sophisticated and lyrically charged prose as well as his influence on their writings. It was Dan Miron, however, who paved the way for a scholarly work on Gnessin back in the sixties. In the eighties, he edited Gnessin's collected writings with annotations together with Israel Zmora, and published two monographies on his poetics—the second one only a few years ago, in 2014.[1]

Discovering the Aesthetic Place

"The first time that Nachum Hagzar set foot in that pleasant house at the far end of the quiet street," Gnessin begins his novella *Ha-ẓidah*, "was due to some trivial reason that was forgotten by him no sooner than

1 Dan Miron, Ḥaḥim be'apo shel ha-neẓaḥ. Yiẓirato shel Uri Nisan Gnesin [Posterity Hooked. The Travail and Achievement of Uri Nissan Gnessin], Jerusalem 1997; idem, Madu'a Gnessin? Shlosha iyunim [Why Gnessin? Three Studies], Jerusalem 2014; Kol kitve Uri Nisan Gnesin [Collected Works of Uri Nissan Gnessin], ed. by Dan Miron and Israel Zmora, 2 vols., Tel Aviv 1982.

In Their Surroundings, 55–67 | doi.org/10.13109/9783666306112.55

Fig. 1: Uri Nissan Gnessin, undated.

it had occurred."[2] Perhaps no other early twentieth-century Hebrew novella or novel begins with a similar sentence, a sentence so exceptional that it forms the core of this paper's argument. First of all, there were not many "pleasant houses" in modern Hebrew prose until the appearance of *Ha-ẓidah* in 1905. It is important to note that literary houses should not merely be understood as metaphors for something else. They are, as Diana Fuss asserts, "important constructs in their own right."[3] Taking heed of Fuss' warning against figurative interpretations of domestic spaces, I would like to offer a reading of the novella that pays special attention to Gnessin's spatial sensitivities. It would appear that he began developing a notion of spatiality in this early text, which sought to tie together the lifeworld of the provincial town and aesthetic issues occupying early modernist Hebrew fiction. Or, to put it differently: He sought to probe the possibility of housing his modernist writing in a provincial town.

Since its publication, Uri Nissan Gnessin's first novella and its enigmatic protagonist, Nachum Hagzar, a literary critic experiencing writer's block and spending three years in a provincial town, have never ceased to fascinate Hebrew writers, poets, and literary critics (figs. 2 and 3).[4] Nevertheless, and without wishing to diminish the importance of his achievements, Miron's hermeneutic frame, established more than half a century ago, remains almost entirely uncontested to this day. Miron interpreted the novella as the story of Hagzar's gradual spiritual deterioration caused by the development of his relationship with three sisters, who captivate him with their erotic allure and become the main reason for his growing inability to write.

Even fifty years later, when Shachar Pinsker addressed the issues of writing and erotic desire in Gnessin's work, the focus lay on the story of Nachum Hagzar and what Pinsker saw as the character's repeated failures. This essay, however, shifts our hermeneutic attention to Hagzar's cultural activities during his sojourn in the provincial town and reads his story alongside that of the three female protagonists, thus including an exploration of the novella's margins in our interpretation. Whereas the first part of this paper outlines Gnessin's spatial thinking, the second part offers a close reading of one key part of the novella and connects its spatial relations to aesthetic issues.

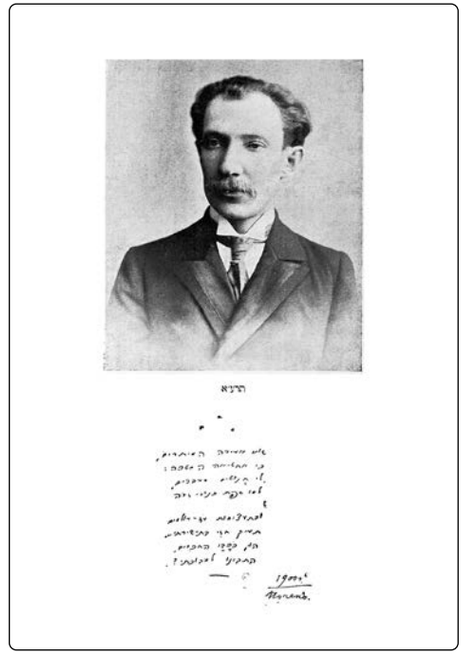
The Benefits of Provinciality

Among the nearly seventy Jewish women writers who lived and worked in Tsarist Russia, only a handful wrote in Hebrew, including Devorah Baron and Ḥava Shapiro. Since the social and cultural sphere surrounding Hebrew literature excluded women almost entirely until well into the 1920s, the first generation of young educated Jewish women appeared only as characters in fiction written by men. It was a hallmark of turn-of the-century Hebrew fiction to imagine and translate conversations, which these young women and men would have had in other languages. Gnessin's novella *Ha-ẓidah* shows some acoustic traces of this multilingualism. In fact, the narrator of the story is a translator from Yiddish—the primary language in which the protagonists converse—to the written language of the story. Apart from Yiddish, characters are also found to read and speak Russian and to speak Ukrainian, at least well enough to sing in it. Hebrew, on the other hand, hardly exceeds its role as a written language, since the only other speaker aside from Hagzar is Gavriel Carmel, who does not

2 Uri Nissan Gnessin, Sideways, transl. by Hillel Halkin, in: Beside and Other Stories, with an introduction by Rachel Albeck-Gidron, New Milford, Conn., 2005, 1–30, here 1.

3 Diana Fuss, The Sense of an Interior. Four Writers and the Rooms that Shaped Them, New York/London 2004, 1.

4 For a summary of the various interpretations of the novella, see Natasha Gordinsky, Ha-ẓidah mi-Moskvah. Ketivato ha-provinẓi'alit shel Uri Nisan Gnesin [Sideways from Moscow. Uri Nissan Gnessin's Provincial Writing], in: Meḥkere Yerushalayim be-sifrut ivrit/Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature (2019), no. 30, 33–56, here 1f.



Figs. 2 and 3: Uri Nissan Gnessin, *Ha-ẓidah*, Jerusalem 1913. The handwritten passage is an earlier poem by Gnessin from 1900.

make his appearance until the end of the novella. Gnessin's perspective thus proves to be crucial for understanding "the benefits of marginality," to borrow Iris Parush's notion of the unique situation of Jewish women in the nineteenth century who, while denied access to the Hebrew language, were fluent in European languages and equally well-read.[5] The young women in *Ha-ẓidah*—Rosa, Manya, and Ida—are representative of this milieu and speak Yiddish, Russian, and French effortlessly.

The epistemological frame of my close reading of Gnessin's novella originates in Gabriele Schwab's concept of "imaginary ethnography," which proposes that texts "*write culture* by inventing a language that redraws the boundaries of imaginable worlds and by providing *thick descriptions* of the desires, fears, and fantasies that shape the imaginary lives and cultural encounters of invented protagonists."[6] "But imaginary ethnographies," asserts Schwab, "do more than write life stories; they also rewrite cultural narratives."[7] One of these cultural narratives is rewritten

5 Iris Parush, Reading Jewish Women. Marginality and Modernization in Nineteenth-Century Eastern European Jewish Society, Waltham, Mass., 172–207.

6 Gabriele Schwab, Imaginary Ethnographies. Literature, Culture, and Subjectivity, New York 2012, 2.

7 Schwab, Imaginary Ethnographies, 2.

by Gnessin when he imagines the encounter between Nachum Hagzar and the three sisters, challenging the perception of provinciality as the antithesis of modernism. This essay thus offers a poetic reflection on the emergence of women as potential agents of cultural change in provincial settings. Gnessin's spatial thinking has been wonderfully summarized by the unusual title of his novella, *Ha-ẓidah*, which captures a poetic movement that travels sideways from the center, both geographically and aesthetically. The trajectory of this close reading of *Ha-ẓidah* traces spatial configurations in Gnessin's writing as well as their relation to the aesthetics of provincial modernism developed throughout his work. Implementing the methodology of imagined ethnographies, the reading builds on Iris Parush's groundbreaking insights into the literacy practices of Eastern European Jews in the nineteenth century. Such a hermeneutic frame allows to situate these literacy practices, which are at the core of Gnessin's text, within the provincial space. To make this relation between space and key cultural practices visible, we shall focus on the representation of reading, which functions as one of the important sites of modernity in the provincial town.

My argument regarding the relation of modernist writing and provinciality may sound contradictory, since the prevailing view of modernism creates a divide between the metropolis and the provinces; yet, current studies call for a decentralized understanding of the different forms of modernism, which leads to the "provincialization of Europe," to use the expression of the cultural historian Dipesh Chakrabarty.[8] As early as the 1980s, the cultural theorist Raymond Williams urged a critical rethinking of the theoretical approach to the relationship between the metropolis and modernism.[9] On the one hand, Williams recognized that the social and cultural character of imperial cities, shaped by mass immigration, was highly conducive to the modernist turn. Thus, the general component underlying the formal innovations inaugurated by modernist aesthetics was immigration to the metropolis. On the other hand, he warned scholars of the inadequacy of a universal version of modernism that ignores the socioeconomic and aesthetic differences between the various places where the movement took hold. In order to account for these differences, Williams proposed, inter alia, the investigation of places far from metropolitan cities, where other forces operate. Williams's approach sheds new light on Gnessin's literary thinking because it highlights its dual movement: to the

8 Dipesh Chakrabarty, Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference, Princeton, N. J., ©2012.

9 Raymond Williams, The Metropolis and the Emergence of Modernism, in: Peter Brooker (ed.), Modernism / Postmodernism, London / New York 1992, 82–94.

big city and, at the same time, to the small, provincial town. Returning to Gnessin's novella, the complete opening passage reads:

> "בפעם הראשונה בא נחום חגזר לאותו הבית היפה, אשר בקצה הרחוב השוקטה, לרגלי סיבה אחת טפילה, שלפרקים היא עולה על לבו והוא חוזר ושוכחה מיד. לתמהונו, פגש אז שם את שכנתו השמנה, העלמה חנה הֶיליר, המשחקת תמיד בקול רם ולמקוטעים, שלא כדרך הטבע, ושם בא עמה גם בדברים בפעם הראשונה. אז דווקא לא שהה שם הרבה, כי היה לבו הפעם אל חלומותיו, והוא מיהר הביתה וכנפי אדרתו פזורות ולבו קודח והוא מחכה ליום מחר ואל העבודה הקבועה ואל החיים המלאים עניין, המתחילים לו בעיר הקטנה החדשה, אשר בחר לו לשבתו אחרי צאתו את וילנה."[10]

> "The first time that Nachum Hagzar set foot in that pleasant house at the far end of the quiet street was due to some trivial reason that was forgotten by him no sooner than it had occurred. Much to his surprise, he met there his stout neighbor, young Hanna Heler, with her unnaturally loud staccato laugh, and conversed with her for the first time, too. Yet he didn't stay long on that occasion, for he was dreaming of other things; feverishly, his coattails flapping behind him, he hurried home to await the new job and the challenging life that would begin the next day, here in this provincial town to which he had chosen to move from Vilna."[11]

This narrative exposition provides a number of important clues for interpreting the story. Right away, the reader learns that Nachum Hagzar attends the "pleasant house" at least more than once, for there is a "first time." It is moreover evident that the narrator withholds information when he hints at "some trivial reason" that brings Hagzar to the house of the three sisters. Thus, this is also the moment in which the temporal texture of the narrative becomes visible, as it represents the act of emplotment.

The reader further discovers that Hagzar has left Vilna, one of the centers of Jewish culture, to settle in a provincial town, where he is about to start teaching in the homes of four different families and, most importantly, where he hopes "to find the leisure to carry out his many literary projects, and afterward to travel in Europe, as had always been his dream."[12] It is not of interest here that none of these hopes and dreams will be truly fulfilled in the end. What potentially lies at the core of Gnessin's text is more than the wish to tell a story; it is his attempt to find a new aesthetic form of telling it.

10 Kol kitve Uri Nisan Gnesin, vol. 1, 135.
11 Gnessin, Sideways, 3.
12 Gnessin, Sideways, 4.

In *Reading the City*, the Israeli literary scholar Oded Menda-Levy argues that the representation of the metropolis and the urban experience was a major theme of early twentieth-century Hebrew literature. Menda-Levy contends that the Hebrew and Yiddish literatures of this period preserved the binary pattern created in the works of Jewish writers of the previous generation, such as Perez Smolenskin and Sholem Aleichem, who placed the metropolis in stark contrast to the shtetl. However, the literature of the early twentieth century reduced the basis of comparison by focusing on "the passages between the urban space and the shtetl."[13] Menda-Levy's poetic-historical statement helps to pinpoint Gnessin's aesthetic choice of moving sideways from the dominant literary model of his time. First of all, it is important to stress that his novella does not take place in a shtetl but in a provincial town and, more specifically, in the movement between the "pleasant house" and the protagonist's room. Second, the passage between the two kinds of space is left outside the narration. For even if we seek to examine *Ha-ẓidah* only from Hagzar's point of view, his narrative of spatial movement contains two contesting, if not contradictory, trajectories. On the one hand, there is the generational phenomenon of young Jewish men (and only very gradually of women, who were much less socially mobile at that time), who aspire to migrate from small towns to one of the metropolises of Western Europe. However, it is not a sense of longing for the big city that stands at the novella's heart, but the possibility of a return to the province and to writing in Hebrew. It seems that Gnessin incrementally suspends the geographical and cultural telos of the yearning that Hagzar experiences for Western Europe until the end of the novella. However, by then, the protagonist's nostalgic gaze is directed toward the Vilna of his youth, which he remembers as a place of learning, where he spent "long, monumental nights of writing in his room" and working in the Strashun Library.[14] At the same time, the novella offers a competing narrative, that of Rosa, who seeks to create a local culture in collaboration with other young women and men.

Ha-ẓidah should be read as an imaginary ethnography not only because Gnessin rewrites the trajectory of the dominant cultural narrative of movement, shifting the point of gravitation from the metropolis to the province, but also, and no less importantly, because he reflects on the literacy practices of young Jewish women and men at the turn of the twentieth century at the two foundational sites of culture, namely of read-

13 Oded Menda-Levy, Likro' et ha-ir. Ha-ḥawayah ha-urbanit ba-siporet ha-ivrit me-emẓa ha-me'ah ha-19 ad emẓa ha-me'ah ha-20 [Reading the City. The Urban Experience in Hebrew Fiction from the Mid-Nineteenth to the Mid-Twentieth Century], Tel Aviv 2010, 117.
14 Gnessin, Sideways, 30.

Fig. 4: Synagogue in Gnessin's hometown Pochep.

ing and writing (fig. 4). In her recent groundbreaking book *The Sin of Writing and the Rise of Modern Hebrew Literature*, Iris Parush traces the writing revolution that took place in nineteenth-century Eastern European Jewish society. She reveals how the dominance of "oral literacy" gradually gave way to a new perception of written culture, which eventually took over during the Haskalah.[15] Such a shift in literary practices enabled the *mitmaskilim* to constitute new forms of subjectivities through their own writing. In Parush's words, the writing revolution "was one of the main engines of secularization and modernization in this society, and there was hardly any area that it left unchanged."[16] In the concluding remarks of her book, Parush contends that in maskilic culture, writing was seen as a forbidden source of pleasure—an act of sin and hubris. This relationship reverberated in texts written by later generations of Eastern European writers, especially in the corpus of the following generation, who started publishing after 1881, and to which also Gnessin belonged, the *teḥiyah* (the Hebrew revival). But whereas writing in Hebrew was an almost exclusively male cultural practice at the turn of the twentieth century, reading in a European language, as Iris Parush shows in her book *Reading Jewish Women*, was a literary practice in which women not only participated but also excelled—they often acquired a more advanced knowledge of European languages and literatures than men.[17]

The Space of Reading

In the absence of social mobility in the provinces, education becomes an important goal for the three sisters in *Ha-ẓidah*, which is exemplified by Manya's attempt to enter a Russian gymnasium, Ida's effort to become an excellent student, and the three sisters' desire to create a space for study and intellectual discussion in their drawing room. Thus, in one of the

15 Iris Parush, The Sin of Writing and the Rise of Modern Hebrew Literature, transl. by Jeffrey M. Green, Cham 2022, 9.
16 Parush, The Sin of Writing and the Rise of Modern Hebrew Literature, 8.
17 Parush, Reading Jewish Women, 244.

most beautiful parts of the novella, Gnessin describes a reading group in which Hagzar participates together with the three sisters. This scene can be interpreted as a continuous act of reading that starts with Hagzar's anticipation of both the approaching fall and the time that he will be able to spend with the three sisters: "[T]hat dear, pleasant house would be warm and well lit. Beneath its spread of red velvet the couch would be spacious and soft; the lively eyes of the three pretty sisters would glow with a tender light."[18] Once autumn arrives, Hagzar's vision of a delightful time together comes true, as the reader discovers in this longer passage:

"אחרי כן בא הסתיו, וחגזר סר פעם אחת אל הביבליותיקה, ואירע לידו סיפור אחד יפה מאוד, ולקח אותו בערב ובא אתו לשם ויקראהו באוזני העלמות עד תומו בלילה אחד. ולמוחרת בבוקר כבר הלכה אתו יחד רוזה אל הביבליותיקה לבחור ב'עוד איזה דבר יפה', שיהיה להם למקרא בלילה הבא. והשמַים היו כבר קודרים, והרוחות היו מיַללות, והבּצה עמוקה, וטיפות הגשמים דוקרות ומטפחות ומרטיבות. בימים הראשונים היו קוראים רק שלושתם; אולם מעט מעט היתה גם אידה לאחת השומעות התדירות. היא היתה באה חיוורת, והפר הצחור בידה, והיתה יושבת חרש באחת הפינות ומשלבת את ידיה על חזה ומקשיבה דומם. מאניה היתה יושבת על קצה הסוֹפה ונשענת בזרועה על אדן החלון, ורוזה היתה סרוחה על משענת הנדנדה ומַפנה אותה בעצלתיים לעברים, ומעומק היציע האדומה היה קוֹלח קולו הצלוּל של חגזר וקורא להם בהטעמה ובמתינות רוגשת מתוך הספר אשר בידו. יש שהיתה מאניה שואלת דבר בזהירות ובמאמרים מרוסקים, והוא היה מבאר לה ברכרוכית־לב כבושה ובהשתדלות יתירה, או שהיתה רוזה מַשׂגת דבר מה, והוא היה משיב בתחילה בותרנוּת קלילה וחיישנית קצת ואחרי כן בכובד־ראש ההולך הלוֹך וגָבוֹר. וכשהיתה רוֹזה עומדת עת רבה על שלה, בלי דברים ברורים, רק בהחלטה בטוחה, הוא היה מתחיל חושב בפני עצמו, כי רוזה קוראה מדברי הספר את שֶׁלָּהּ, והיה בא לידי החלטה, כי היא הוגה מחשבות ולה יש רכוש נפש טמיר, המדבר מתוך גרונה, אותו רכוש הנפש, שישנו לכל האנשים אשר עברו גלים על ראשם. והיה זוכר פתאום את הצעיר העלֵז ואת הלצותיה הארסיות של רוֹזה, והיה דבר־מה מתחיל קוסס את לבו, והוא היה חושב במרירות, כי בכלל הלא נשמת האשה מגילה סתומה לו לגמרי — ולא עוד, אלא שככה יהיה הדבר לעולמים ואין לזה תקנה; משום שיִחוּסיו אל הנשים הרי הם במהותם שגיאה אחת גדולה, שאין לה כל תקנה. והיה זוכר רגע את שכנתו השמנה, אשר קיבּוֹרוֹתיה השמַנות נתקלות תמיד בשלו, מדי לכתה אתו שכם אל שכם, והיו מתחילים מרפרפים בלבבו ונגוזים, כצללי הינשופים בלילות ירח קפואים, צללי מחשבות ארעיות וניצני הרגשות שנעלבו מימי היות לו שיח ושיג עם רוזה ואפילו עם מאניה זו. והיה מסתכל בפני רוזה הטהורים והנאצלים ולא היה מוצא בהם לכאורה כלום, אלא שהיה בטוח משום מה, כי יש שעיניה מזכירות לו רגע אחד את החתול האפור אשר לו, הרובץ תמיד על הקוֹמוֹדה האדומה אשר בחדרו. והיה נדמה לו אפילו, כי דווקא דבר זה מהנה אותו מאוד. ורוֹזה היתה בינתיים פוסקת מהניד את הנדנדה, ועיניה היו מזהירות, ולחייה היו מווּרידות משהו, וקולה היה נפעם ונרעד מהתרגשות

18 Gnessin, Sideways, 10.

של הנאת הרוח, והוא היה ניעור פתאום ומתחיל סותר, גם כן בלי דברים ברורים, את טענותיה של זו, המטושטשות, והיה מתרגש ושואל מרגע לרגע: 'התָבין? התָבינין?'"[19]

> "One autumn day Hagzar went to the public library and borrowed an absorbing new book which he took that same night to the pleasant house and read aloud there in a single sitting. When he went the next day to return it, Rosa accompanied him in the hope of finding 'something else just nice' which they might read the following night. The sky was covered with clouds. The wind raged, the mud reached their ankles, and raindrops spattered down. At first they formed a trio for these readings. Gradually, though, Ida had joined their little group too. Palely holding her white pillow, she would enter the room and sit listening silently in one of the corners with her arms crossed before her. Manya sat on the couch's edge, one arm draped over the window sill, while Rosa leaned against the back of the rocking chair, swaying slowly with it back and forth. Ensconced in red velvet, Hagzar read clearly and with controlled emotion from the volume that he held in his hands. Sometimes Manya asked a spiteful, disjointed question, which he did his best to answer without showing his distress. Sometimes Rosa challenged him too. In the beginning he deferred to her by blithely, almost shyly agreeing, yet soon he took to arguing back. And when she refused to back down—not with any great show of logic, to be sure, but with an adamancy that spoke for itself—he concluded that she was a person with a mind of her own and rare properties of soul such as belonged only to those who have been through a great deal in life. […] Her voice, which trembled when she spoke with the excitement of the pleasures of the mind, brought him back to himself. At once he began to refute her, none too logically himself, stopping repeatedly to ask: 'Do you follow me? Well, do you?'"[20]

As if written as an additional act for Anton Chekhov's play *Tri sestry* (The Three Sisters), Gnessin creates in this scene an intimate choreography of joint reading that at the same time reveals once again his spatial sensitivity.[21] In his book on the cultural history of home as an idea, Witold Rybczynski maintains that privacy and domesticity were "the two great discoveries of the Bourgeois Age."[22] The reading scene is staged within the private

19 Kol kitve Uri Nisan Gnesin, vol. 1, 142f.
20 Gnessin, Sideways, 10f.
21 On Gnessin's intertextual dialogue with Chekhov's *Tri sestry*, see Gordinsky, Ha-ẓidah mi-Moskvah, 37–42.
22 Witold Rybczynski, Home. A Short History of an Idea, Harmondsworth 1986, 77.

sphere of home, in a room inhabited by comfortable furniture—the velvet red couch, the rocking chair, the candle lights lit during the dark autumn evening—all what makes the aesthetic experience even more pleasurable. Based on a pioneering work of the Italian art critic Mario Praz, dedicated to the philosophy of interior design, Rybczynski reflects on the intimacy created by a room and its furniture, a certain *Stimmung* (mood) that "is a characteristic of interiors that has less to do with functionality than with the way that the room conveys the character of its owner."[23]

The "pleasant house" in which the reading takes place, the drawing room with its red velvety couch create a *Stimmung* that conveys Rosa's taste. At the same time, the description of the drawing room also mirrors Rosa's aesthetic sensitivity, for on the second day, Rosa accompanies Hagzar to the library to choose a new novel together. What novels did they read and in what languages—in Yiddish or rather in Russian? The reader does not find out, but judging from the description of the library as a public one, the "absorbing novels" would have likely been in Russian.

The representation of this reading scene—or, for that matter, of the reading scenes, since the narrator outlines a shared practice spanning several weeks—provides a hermeneutic key to Gnessin's understanding of the role of Jewish women in the creation of modern Jewish culture. Naomi Seidman, a feminist scholar of Hebrew and Yiddish literature, asserts that intergender reading was one of the fundamental practices that transformed religious literature into literary texts.[24] It seems, though, that Gnessin's thick description of reading goes beyond the representation of what Seidman calls "heterosexual sentimental education."[25] Unlike the various reading scenes described by Seidman in her book, which take place as a part of erotic courting and disclose the books being read, Gnessin withholds the titles his characters enjoy together—an omission that is not accidental.

Read through the Bakhtinian prism of dialogical thought, this reading scene has a paradigmatic element to it that not only exposes the inter-subjective learning process, but also the beginning of a process that only Hagzar undergoes, namely his recognition of Rosa and her sisters both in erotic terms and as interlocutors, thus enabling him to move sideways from the sexual objectification of the young women. Parush describes the common practice of joint reading and the discussion of Hebrew and European languages by young men and soon-to-be maskilim as a ritual that was one of the basic literary practices for the establishing of a

23 Rybczynski, Home, 44.
24 Naomi Seidman, The Marriage Plot. Or, How Jews Fell in Love with Love, and with Literature, Stanford, Calif., 2016, 35.
25 Seidman, The Marriage Plot, 21–69.

Jewish community.[26] By imagining the reading scene with young women instead of men, Gnessin seeks therefore to expand the understanding of the reading community, albeit in Russian rather than Hebrew. Hagzar's entry into the feminine space is not self-evident, and it appears that, over the course of several evenings together, he recognizes the emotional and intellectual generosity of the sisters, who wish to conduct an ongoing dialogue with him. But the persona of Hagzar, who eventually fails to establish an intersubjective, intergendered space, should not be confused with Gnessin, his creator. For it is in this reading scene that Gnessin reveals his striking spatial awareness of the way in which women experienced modernity and its relation to interior space. Wendy Gan, a scholar of early twentieth-century British literature, argues that, in opposition to the usual modern paradigm of the urban experience of the flaneur or flaneuse, "new forms of interiors thus stand alongside the city in defining a woman's experience of modernity."[27] Gan reveals how the sensitivity of (mainly middle class) women to the condition of modernity manifested itself in a desire for spatial privacy. She elucidates that it is through their demand for privacy in their own homes, where they were previously defined by their domestic roles, that they could "claim a modern subjectivity."[28] Through this new spatial awareness that emerged at the turn of the twentieth century, women started shaping their conception of privacy "as offering solitude but providing the option of being in community too."[29] It was often a drawing room and not the masculine connotated space of a study, argues Gan, which enabled women to reconfigure the domestic space and to become agents of modernity. The drawing room is the place where the sisters can demand privacy for themselves, while, at the same time, establishing an intellectual community through the practice of joint reading. Additionally, Gnessin's placing of the reading scene in the drawing room provides perhaps the most important explanation for Hagzar's perception of the house in which the three sisters dwell as "pleasant." Following the influential proposition of American historian John Lukacs about the function of the interior in the formation of society—"the interior furniture of houses appeared together with the interior furniture of minds"[30]—the

26 Parush, The Sin of Writing and the Rise of Modern Hebrew Literature, 261–264.
27 Wendy Gan, Women, Privacy and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century British Writing, Basingstoke 2009, 2.
28 Gan, Women, Privacy and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century British Writing, 10.
29 Gan, Women, Privacy and Modernity in Early Twentieth-Century British Writing, 21.
30 John Lukacs, The Bourgeois Interior. Why the Most Maligned Characteristic of the Modern Age May Yet Be Seen As Its Most Precious Asset, in: The American Scholar 39 (1970), no. 4, 616–630, here 623.

recurrent adjective "*yafe*" (pleasant) could be interpreted as an aesthetic category, which refers not only to the interior of a house but to the very minds of the three young women, who are engaged in the aesthetic experience of reading. While the drawing room functions for Rosa, Manya, and Ida as the main site for their experience of modernity, the fictional "pleasant house" in Gnessin's first novella becomes a house of fiction—a house of modern Hebrew *belles lettres*.

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Yosef Ḥayyim Brenner

MATAN HERMONI

Between Here, Now, and Then: Yosef Ḥayyim Brenner

In Amos Oz's early short story *Derekh ha-ruaḥ* (The Way of the Wind), Yolek, the mythical forefather of an Israeli kibbutz, says to his son, a schlimazel ironically named Gideon, "Why don't you read a page in Brenner, he will tell you of fate, and of despair and fate." In these short lines, Oz demonstrates the way in which the figure of Yosef Ḥayyim Brenner's writing was perceived among the socialist blue-collar elite of Zionist settlers. Not only was Brenner the one to turn to for advice and truth about the human soul, but his work was seen as canonical. In order to emphasize Brenner's religious significance to this elite, Oz uses the word *daf* (page), a term associated with Jewish religious texts such as the Mishnah and the Talmud. In many respects, Brenner was a secular rebbe.

Indeed, among the intellectual circles of the Zionist movement, Brenner was considered a holy man and his writings sacred scriptures. This is reflected in the covers of the different editions of his collected writings as printed from the 1920s, following Brenner's death, until 1978, when the last edition was published, not long after the historic defeat of the Israeli Labor Party.

Generally speaking, Brenner was the great architect of modern Hebrew culture. His novellas and novels set narrative landmarks. His critical essays defined aesthetic criteria. But more than that, his writings documented the "nerves" *(aẓabim)*, to use the title of one of his best-known prose works, the pathos, and the absurd. Brenner's writings thus serve as a sort of "black box" of the spirit of Zionism and modern Hebrew literature. Ever since his death in the riots of 1921, scholars of many fields keep decoding his dense body of work.

Brenner was born in 1881, in a small town in the Pale of Settlement, the rural areas in the western part of Tsarist Russia where Jews were allowed to settle, mostly today's Belarus and Ukraine (**fig. 1**). Brenner's childhood and youth paint the classic biography of a young Jewish intellectual: Brought up and educated traditionally, he left for the city to study at some of the renowned yeshivas, in Gomel and Pochep, where he was also introduced to secular thought and literature. Brenner was strongly influenced

In Their Surroundings, 71–76 | doi.org/10.13109/9783666306112.71

Fig. 1: Yosef Ḥayyim Brenner (center), surrounded by his sisters and brothers, 1913.

by the new ideas of the Haskalah, the Jewish Enlightenment movement that laid the foundation of modern Zionism. In 1901, Brenner was drafted into the Tsarist army but defected after two years of service. Yet, even during his military years, he was very much committed to his literary work.

In 1903 and 1904, Brenner published his first two novels, the semi-autobiographical *Ba-ḥoref* (In Winter) and *Mi-saviv la-nekudah* (Around the Point), in parts in the Hebrew monthly *Ha-Shiloaḥ* (The Sending) in Odessa. Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik, then the journal's literary editor and the leading Hebrew poet and thinker of his time, commented in a letter to the ambitious young writer on the fragmented nature of his works. In many respects, generations of scholars saw Bialik's comments as a key to understanding the structure of Brenner's prose.

After escaping Tsarist Russia with the help from his Bundist friends in 1904, Brenner settled in the poor immigrant quarter Whitechapel in London. Although he suffered a severe depression, Brenner's London years were crucial to his career. With the publication of his literary journal *Ha-Me'orer* (The Awakener), he led the way of a whole generation of young Hebrew writers and Zionist thinkers. Steering a course between the pundits of Zionism, such as Bialik, Aḥad Ha-Am, and Joseph Klausner, who were still living in their familiar surroundings of Odessa, Brenner developed a non-romantic, pessimistic, and even neurotic vision of national Jewish life. At the same time, he was the first major Zionist writer and thinker who sailed from the port of Trieste in Italy to Haifa, as his Socialist Zionist comrades of the second wave of Jewish immigration, *Ha-aliyah ha-shniyah*, had done before him.

Some of Brenner's biographers argue that his immigration to Palestine in 1909 was followed by a deep depression that echoed in his writings, while others describe his psychological state at that time as manic. One way or another, his first years in Jaffa and Jerusalem were the peak of his career as a writer (**fig. 2**). These were also formative years for Hebrew literature.

In 1910 and 1911, Brenner published three landmark literary pieces: the novella *Aẓabim* (Nerves), the novel *Mi-kan ve-mi-kan* (From Here and There), and the essay *Ha-z'aner ha-Ereẓ Isra'eli ve-avizarehu* (The Eretz-Israeli Genre and Its Properties). In these three works, Brenner not only examined and documented so clearly this critical era in Zionist history, but he also crystallized the aesthetics and human condition of his time. His first works written in Palestine were a psychological account and an analysis best described as meditations on his own biography. Brenner, as was noted by the late poet Nathan Zach, was highly self-centered and sensitive to his own needs and feelings. The resemblance of his fictional plots to his own life is hence evident. For example, a reading of Shin Shalom's memoir of his travels alongside Brenner from Europe to the ports of Palestine shows that Brenner drew on very specific details of his own journeys to depict those of his protagonist.

Fig. 2: Postcard of the Hebrew theater lovers in honor of Yosef Ḥayyim Brenner, 1913/14.

Aẓabim is told as the confession of a sinner, in the style of Lev Tolstoy's *Kreytserova sonata* (The Kreutzer Sonata), or of the more contemporary *A mentsh fun Buenos-Ayres* (A Man from Buenos Aires) by Yiddish writer

Sholem Aleichem, for whom Brenner worked as a secretary for a short time in 1905 in London. Only here, the sin is not a murder like in Tolstoy's novella, nor is it human trafficking, as in Sholem Aleichem's. Although not explicitly mentioned, it is clear that the sin to which the protagonist confesses is Zionism. *Aẓabim* is undoubtedly a Zionist tale, even ultra-Zionist, as Hannan Hever asserts.[1] But this is where Brenner outlines his secular theology: He veils the Zionist tale in a cloud of doubt, an equation in which Zionism is an eternal internal conflict.

This is the poetic and historic agenda Brenner pursues throughout *Mi-kan ve-mi-kan*, the first of two major novels that he wrote in Palestine, about life in the countryside. In *Aẓabim*, Brenner displays this doubt openly by having the protagonist, the confessor, repeatedly use the word *aẓabim*, meaning nerves or a psychiatric state of depression or even delusion. In *Mi-kan ve-mi-kan*, he uses a different technique that works on a similar principle. The novel consists of the fictional notebooks of a great wanderer and sufferer of the Jewish exile. It is a tale of aliyah, of a Zionist migration, albeit a failed one, as the protagonist ultimately turns his back on Zionism and returns to a life in exile.

In one of his most significant essays, *Ha-zhaner ha-Ereẓ Israeli ve-avizareyhu*, which was composed in the same period, Brenner elaborates what he sees as the proper aesthetics of Zionist immigration. He denounces the images of Palestine evoked by Zionist writers of the previous generation, such as Joshua Barzilay and Perez Smolenskin, as kitsch. In many respects, Brenner provides an interpretation or a set of keys for the reading of his prose works himself.

In the following years, Brenner wrote little if any prose. He grew closer to the Zionist socialist movement and was actively involved in its newspaper, *Ha-Po'el Ha-Ẓa'ir* (The Young Worker). He published many influential essays on the history of modern Hebrew literature: *Ha-arakhat aẓmenu ba-shloshet ha-krakhim* (Our Self-Assessment in the Three Volumes [of Mendele's *Collected Works*]), *Azkarah le-Y. L. G.* (In Memory of Y. L. G[ordon]), and *Mikhah Yosef Berdychevski* on the evolution of modern prose. These papers, as well as his heartbreaking elegy for Uri Nissan Gnessin, still constitute milestones in the critique of, and scholarly engagement with, Hebrew literature.

In 1920, Brenner published his last major novel, *Shkhol ve-kishalon* (Breakdown and Bereavement), a sinister view of life in Palestine during World War I. His pessimistic outlook on the future of Zionism was intertwined with personal depression. He was murdered during the riots of 1921, in Abu Kabir on the outskirts of Tel Aviv-Jaffa (fig. 3). Although a very detailed record of the last day of his life exists, the circumstances of his death remain a mystery and, just like his life and work in general, invite different interpretations.

1 Hannan Hever, Ha-sipur ve-ha-le'om. Kri'ot bikortiyot be-kanon ha-siporet ha-ivrit [The Narrative and the Nation. Critical Readings in the Canon of Hebrew Fiction], Tel Aviv 2007.

Fig. 3: Drawing of Yosef Ḥayyim Brenner's death by Shaul Raskin, ca. 1921.

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RONI HENIG

Troubled Speech, Hebrew Subjects, and the Problem of Meaning-Making: Speaking Hebrew in Yosef Ḥayyim Brenner's *Shkhol ve-kishalon* (Breakdown and Bereavement, 1920)

Among early twentieth-century Hebrew writers, perhaps no other was as enthralled with the nuance and reverberations of speech as Yosef Ḥayyim Brenner. Brenner's literary works exhibit heightened sensibility to speaking practices. His stories are filled with catalogues of sounds, accents, voices, and gestures that surround spoken language. His narrators are obsessively concerned with the musicality and disharmony that make up human speech, and his protagonists chatter, chime, murmur, buzz, or stammer their words out.[1] In particular, Brenner is attentive to the bodily dimension of speech and the unintended significations that the speaking body adds to the words that it speaks. In his works, then, what is said is always haunted by the act of saying, and the speaking body necessarily exceeds what it says.

Since migrating to Palestine in 1909, Brenner's attentiveness to speech had become entwined with the broader questions of mimesis, representation, and the possibility of authentic expression that have preoccupied him throughout his literary career (**fig. 1**). Hebraist calls to instill Hebrew in the lives of Jewish immigrants, and concrete attempts to employ it as a spoken language within the Jewish settlement in Palestine (the Yishuv), percolated into his literary works and shaped anew his poetic and philosophical reflections on language. Not only the dynamics of speech, but Hebrew speech in particular now became a dominant theme in his oeuvre.[2]

1 The trope of Hebrew stammer allowed Brenner to enact within his poetics an iterated experience of transition and deferral, both typical of the literary discourse of Hebrew revival. Roni Henig, Stammering Hebrew. Y. H. Brenner's Deferred Beginnings in the Novel "Me-Hathala," in: Comparative Literature Studies 56 (2019), no. 2, 229–259.

2 Ariel Hirschfeld and Allison Schachter have shown how in works written in and about Palestine, language, and particularly situations of Hebrew speech, become a major locus for the drama of the narratives. See Ariel Hirschfeld, Retet ẓamarot

In Their Surroundings, 77–91 | doi.org/10.13109/9783666306112.77

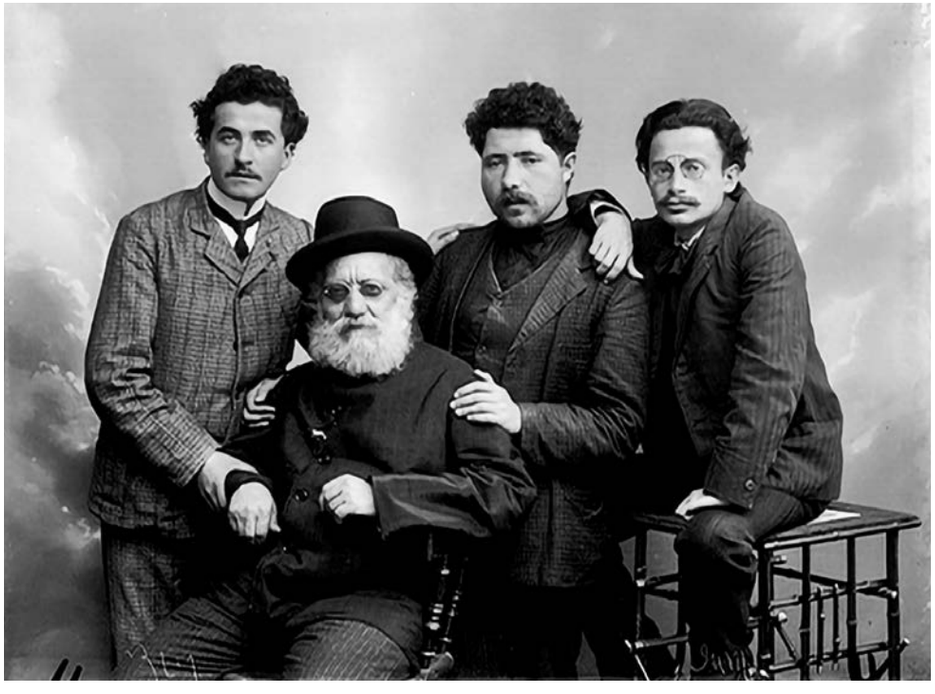

Fig. 1: From left to right: the writers Shmuel Yosef Agnon, Alexander Siskind Rabinovitz (known as Azar, sitting), Yosef Ḥayyim Brenner, and David Shimoni, 1910.

Brenner repeatedly explored the poetic potentialities that became available as the status of Hebrew and its relationship to other languages continued to transform. If the concern with spoken language previously served Brenner in displaying the latent incongruities between words and their objects, or between spoken languages and the bodies who speak them, then speaking Hebrew not only intensified this initial mistrust, but also cast the practice of Hebrew writing within a cluster of ideological and poetic expectations and a newly articulated language politics.

This essay focuses on a seemingly marginal moment of Hebrew speaking in the novel *Shkhol ve-kishalon* (Breakdown and Bereavement). Closely reading this moment, it explores the ways in which the possibility and threat of Hebrew speech, as imagined in Brenner's literary oeuvre, stirred up a series of questions within his literary narration, including his choice to

ve-dagim meluḥim. Al "ha-milim ve-ha-devarim" be-"Aẓabim" le-Y. Ḥ. Brener [Trembling Treetops and Salty Fish. On "Words and Facts" in "Aẓabim" by Y. Ḥ. Brenner], in: Judith Bar-El/Yigal Schwartz/Tamar S. Hess (eds.), Sifrut ve-ḥevrah ba-tarbut ha-ivrit ha-ḥadashah [Literature and Society in Modern Hebrew Culture], Tel Aviv 2000, 71–81; Allison Schachter, Diasporic Modernisms. Hebrew and Yiddish Literature in the Twentieth Century, Oxford/New York 2011, 55–83.

write in Hebrew. Considering Brenner's criticism of the Jewish settlement in Palestine and its language politics, I ask, what critique is possible when critical intervention itself is challenged by the instability of the narrating authority? Through seemingly critical, ironic, or ridiculing representation of Hebrew speech, Brenner evokes a self-reflective questioning of both his narrative and the critical agency that it sets forth. At the same time, I argue, the performativity of Hebrew speech makes visible the identification of national Hebrew subjects as rooted in an artificial process of meaning-making, which leaves little room for the possibility of original, natural, or authentic expression. Such artificial identifications underscore the fictional nature of national linguistic attachment. In this respect, they carry a liberating potentiality that may fleetingly dismantle the grip of national subjectivity.

In recent years, scholars researching Brenner and his works have largely moved away from previous tendencies to ground his position in an ethical commitment to sincerity. Instead, scholarship has gravitated towards interrogating the disintegration that characterizes Brenner's narratives, the reflexivity and unreliability of his narrators, and the challenges that his prose fiction poses to the very possibility of literary mimesis.[3] In that vein, Shai Ginsburg has shown that, for Brenner, literary representation was entwined with categories of territory and space, and that his migration to Palestine rendered the European literary forms that were at his disposal inadequate for narrating the experience of uprootedness typical of that community of recent immigrants to the land.[4] I propose that the conscious awareness of the lack of such adequate form implicates the narrative of *Shkhol ve-kishalon* from its inception. Yet, this inadequacy in and of itself finds an effective model of representation in the very problematics of insufficient Hebrew speech.

The novel *Shkhol ve-kishalon*, which Brenner began writing in 1914 and published in 1920, summoned various opportunities to engage with Hebrew

3 See, for instance, Eyal Bassan, Affirmative Weakening. Y. H. Brenner and the Weak Rethinking of the Politics of Hebrew Literature, in: Rethinking History 19 (2015), no. 1, 41–60; Dina Berdichevsky, Yehudim, masa'im ve-she'ar ḥasre ha-z'aner. Ha-mikreh shel Brener ve-tekufato [Jews, Essayists, and Other Genreless People. The Case of Brenner and His Time], in: Mi-kan. Ketav et le-ḥeker ha-sifrut ve-ha-tarbut ha-yehudit ve-ha-isra'elit [From Here. A Journal for the Study of Jewish and Israeli Literature and Culture] 20 (2020), 26–46; Shai Ginsburg, Rhetoric and Nation. The Formation of Hebrew National Culture, 1880–1990, Syracuse, N. Y., 2014, 108–152; Michael Gluzman, Ha-guf ha-ẓiyoni. Le'umiyut, migdar ve-miniyut ba-sifrut ha-ivrit ha-ḥadashah [The Zionist Body. Nationalism, Gender, and Sexuality in Modern Hebrew Literature], Tel Aviv 2007, 136–181; Hannan Hever, Ha-sipur ve-ha-le'om. Kri'ot bikortiyot be-kanon ha-siporet ha-ivrit [The Narrative and the Nation. Critical Readings in the Canon of Hebrew Fiction], Tel Aviv 2007, 47–75.

4 Ginsburg, Rhetoric and Nation, 131.


י. ח. ברנר

שכול וכשלון

או

ספר ההתלבטות

הוצאת אברהם יוסף שטיבל

ניויורק • ווארשה • כוסקבה

שנת שש מאות וסמונים


י.ח. ברנר

שכול וכשלון

או

ספר ההתלבטות

הוצאת שטיבל, אמריקה

Figs. 2 and 3: Yosef Ḥayyim Brenner's *Shkhol ve-kishalon*, published in New York, Warsaw, and Moscow in 1920.

speech (figs. 2 and 3). The novel takes place in Ottoman Palestine. It tells the story of Yehezkel Hefetz, a Jewish immigrant who recently arrived in the land, hoping to become an agricultural laborer and fulfill the Zionist imperative to shed his diasporic attributes, restore his masculinity, and embody the ideal of a new Hebrew subject. Immediately, however, his wish is met with a resounding failure, and Hefetz, who throughout the course of the novel suffers a series of physical and mental breakdowns, is sent out of the agricultural group to live with relatives in Jerusalem, where he also spends time in a mental institution. The community of Eastern European Jewish immigrants in Jerusalem is at the center of this novel. The protagonists, members of the Hefetz family and their acquaintances, struggle with sickness, unemployment, poverty, and loss. They are emotionally and sexually troubled, and their romantic pursues are destined to failure.

As is the case in many of Brenner's works, it is clear that, for the most part, the languages that the characters speak differ from the language of narration, Hebrew. Although all dialogues are imparted in Hebrew—albeit strewn with foreign vocabulary—Yiddish is implied to be the more commonly spoken language. Readers are told early on that in Palestine, Hefetz

"had spoken the native language of a Jew from Eastern Europe, […] and if now and then he had actually conversed in Hebrew with a teacher, or a student, or an aspiring young girl, they had all felt a bit superior."[5] Speaking Hebrew is presented ironically not only as a largely uncommon practice, but also as part of an artificial and pretentious facade associated with nationally oriented institutions.

In her reading of the novel, which focuses on Hebrew speech, the tensions between Hebrew and Yiddish, and the multilingual conditions of Hebrew writing, Allison Schachter has argued that the entire work is framed as a fictional translation from Yiddish.[6] Schachter compellingly shows how, through embedded stories of translation and linguistic failings, the novel is imprinted with the translational trace of Yiddish. She thus argues that "the Hebrew of Brenner's novel conceals its fictional Yiddish source,"[7] and in so doing, the novel voices a critique of Hebraist monolingual national culture and its claim for dominance within the Yishuv.

While I agree with Schachter that *Shkhol ve-kishalon* is riddled with linguistic failings that underscore the fraught language politics of the time, I take a different approach to Brenner's preoccupation with Hebrew speech. I argue that Brenner deploys Hebrew speech—in its brokenness, dysfluency, and foreign influences—to represent a fundamental incongruity between language and identity. In this respect, Hebrew speaking, rather than revealing a Yiddish origin that is concealed within the Hebrew text, represents the very uprooting of the assumption of a native tongue.

Eyal Bassan has shown that Brenner's literary writing, including his nihilistic critique of Zionism, often provides "a critical account of the very possibility and legitimacy of the critique itself."[8] For Bassan, Brenner's criticism is only available by means of "weakening affirmation," that is, by the weakening of strong identities through the acknowledgement that "contingency is pertinent to the question of identity."[9] My reading suggests that the accentuated Hebrew speech that is embedded in the narrative of *Shkhol ve-kishalon* exposes the problematic mechanism of meaning-

5 Yosef Ḥayim Brener, Shkhol ve-kishalon o sefer ha-hitlabtut [Breakdown and Bereavement], in: Ketavim [Writings], 4 vols., here vol. 2, Tel Aviv 1977, 1443–1688, here 1456; Yosef Haim Brenner, Breakdown and Bereavement, transl. and with an introduction by Hillel Halkin, New Milford, Conn., 2004, 17.

6 The novel opens with a fictional foreword, in which the narrator "confesses" that he had converted Hefetz's original diaries from the first person to the third person. Schachter argues that such adaptation must have also involved a translation of the text, since Hefetz could have only written his diaries in Yiddish.

7 Schachter, Diasporic Modernisms, 57.

8 Bassan, Affirmative Weakening, 43.

9 Bassan, Affirmative Weakening, 52.

making particular to the symbolic space of "the Holy Land" that the novel portrays, a mechanism that is extended to the act of Hebrew narration. At the same time, in the constraints and limitations that Hebrew speaking imposes on its speakers, Brenner also identifies a productive possibility to narrate the theatricality of national and ethnic identities. While that possibility may not amount to a shattering critique of the national project, it provides the narrative with fleeting moments of sobriety, in which failing identifications gesture towards the fragile, paradoxical logic that comprises nationalist systems of signification.

This paper will address in detail one anecdote in the narrative in which Shneirson (an acquaintance of the Hefetz family and a former private tutor to Yehezkel's beloved cousin, Miriam) engages in a Hebrew conversation with his new Sephardic girlfriend, who remains nameless throughout the story. Shneirson is described earlier in the novel as an average "young Hebrew nationalist," who stems "from a well-to-do home." The narrator further mentions that he was "certainly no worse than any of his Russian friends and contemporaries."[10] Shneirson is thus introduced as (yet another) Zionist pioneer, a recent immigrant to the Yishuv, whose nationalist sentiments blend in with those of a banal collectivity. Like others who have "debarked at one time or another off the coast of Palestine's Jaffa," Shneirson, too, is presumed to have "admired the splendid scenery from the deck of the ship, went into town feeling dreadfully moved, [and] lost [his] temper at the Arabs who approached [him] on the way."[11] Those pseudo-impassionate responses of admiration and hostility are depicted as almost mechanical.

A similarly mechanical behavior seems to characterize Shneirson's love life. After having given up on previous romantic pursues, Shneirson becomes involved with a young Sephardic woman. Hebrew speech becomes a central focus of their relationship:

> "שניאורסון, כידוע, הלך בעת האחרונה — לאחר שנכזבה תוחלתו גם מבת בעל־המלון, אך זה אינו מן הענין — ובכן הלך שניאורסון בעת האחרונה שבי אחרי ספרדיה אחת. 'טיפוס אֶכזוֹטי' — הוא אומר, אך סליחה, זה אינו מן הענין, ולא בזה היא הסתירה; הסתירה היא באחרת, בזאת: הספרדיה, ככל חברותיה הבאות בדברים עם הישוב האשכנזי, הישן או החדש, יודעת, כמובן, את הז'ארגון האשכנזי למדי — לא פחות משניאורסון (השוטים בחוץ־לארץ מדמים, שעברית היא השלטת … גם זוהי אניקדוטה!). ואולם למרות שהיא יודעת ושניאורסון יודע שהיא יודעת, והיא יודעת ששניאורסון יודע שהיא יודעת, ושניאורסון יודע שהיא יודעת כי הוא יודע שהיא יודעת, אף על פי כן, גם הוא, שניאורסון, גם היא, אבן־המושכת, הטיפוס האֶכזוֹטי, שניהם מתחפשים, כי חס ושלום … מי? הם? הם יודעים ז'ארגון? שניהם מתחפשים, כי רק השפה העברית היא המקרבת אותם, את שני האֶלמנטים של הישוב …"[12]

> "Recently, as everyone knew, after he had been stood up by the hotel owner's daughter (but this was another story), Shneirson had begun to chase after a certain Sephardic girl, an 'exotic type,' as he put it—though begging everyone's pardon, this too was another story, for the irony did not lie here. No, the irony lay elsewhere: this Sephardic girl, like all the Jews from the Levant who had dealings with the Ashkenazim of Eastern Europe, knew Yiddish perfectly well—as well as Shneirson, in fact. (Abroad every imbecile thought that the Jews in Palestine spoke Hebrew—this too was a story!) Yet despite the fact that she knew, and that Shneirson knew that she knew, and that she knew that Shneirson knew that she knew, and that Shneirson knew that she knew that he knew that she knew—nevertheless, he, Shneirson, and she, the exotic type of his dreams, pretended that … *What? They speak that jargon called Yiddish? The idea!* That is, they made believe that as representatives of the two halves of the Jewish people in the Holy Land they could communicate only in Hebrew."[13]

The irony that motivates the scene seems to grow and multiply as the anecdote unfolds. Shneirson's Orientalist fascination with the "Sephardic girl," what he conceives of as her "exotic" allure, is presented as the first in a series of ironies. His attraction to her echoes the flat admiration of the "splendid scenery" viewed from the deck of the ship upon his arrival in the land. It is an attraction that strips the "Sephardic girl" of any nuance and reduces her to no more than a substitutional "exotic type." Yet, the narrator soon stresses that this artificial love story is not where the main contradiction of the anecdote lies.

The point of the story, the reason for imparting it, lies in the couple's Hebrew speech. By speaking Hebrew to each other, Shneirson and "the Sephardic girl" act out a Zionist fantasy, in which Hebrew operates as a unifying force that could bridge the gaps between Jews of different origins within the charged territory of the "Holy Land." Speaking Hebrew, then, grants the couple entrance into a Hebraist narrative, according to which they can communicate with each other only in Hebrew. That fantasy aligns perfectly with the "imbecile" expectation from "abroad"; the false assumption that "Jews in Palestine spoke Hebrew." An implied audience is thus inserted into the scene, and the two lovers' display of language and identity is framed as a spectacle to behold.

10 Brener, Shkhol ve-kishalon, 1497f.; Brenner, Breakdown and Bereavement, 59.
11 Brener, Shkhol ve-kishalon, 1497f.; Brenner, Breakdown and Bereavement, 59.
12 Brener, Shkhol ve-kishalon, 1636.
13 Brenner, Breakdown and Bereavement, 208.

While the narrator's perspective is ironic, it is nevertheless speaking Hebrew that, in effect, grants the Sephardic woman her momentary appearance in the narrative. Although the narrator ridicules her choice to speak Hebrew (when she could have been communicating perfectly well in Yiddish), it may be noted that it is this choice in the first place that inserts her in the story. The girl speaks both Yiddish and Hebrew. Neither of these languages are "native" to her. Yet, the other languages that she speaks—perhaps Ladino, or Arabic—are absent from this scene. The anecdote therefore marks an underlying linguistic hierarchy, in which Yiddish, which is second to Hebrew, participates in the repression of other languages spoken within the Yishuv. It further demonstrates that Hebrew speech, ironic as it may be, often functions as a condition of visibility (or audibility) in the fictional space that the novel portrays.

In their Hebrew conversation, Shneirson and the Sephardic woman are introduced as actors in a (comedic) play. Practicing Hebrew speech, they comply with a role that is designated for them in the preconceived, imagined drama of ethnicity and nation-building. While they are both clearly aware that they could communicate and understand one another in Yiddish, nevertheless, they are choosing to act as if their relationship depends upon Hebrew as a sole language of communication. The phrase "nevertheless," or "*af-al-pi-khen*," is a particularly charged choice of words in the context of Brenner's literary oeuvre. A recurring gesture that is echoed throughout his work, "the Brennerian *af-al-pi-khen*" has been read traditionally as a persistent expression of resilience in the face of failure and despair. It is not entirely clear whether by framing the couple's Hebrew conversation as yet another moment of "nevertheless," Brenner lends a layer of ideological legitimacy to their linguistic pretense; or alternatively, whether this framing parodies the Brennerian trope itself, presenting it as an empty gesture. Either way, a direct link is established between the questionable practice of Hebrew speech and the practice of Hebrew writing in Palestine.

The couple is said to "pretend" that the language they speak springs naturally from them. The narrator uses the Hebrew verb *mitḥapsim* (literally, to disguise oneself) to name the purported lie in their behavior, thus alluding to the masquerading function of language. By speaking Hebrew, they are performing a linguistic identity that clearly responds to the demands of the ideological space that they inhabit. Playing that prescribed role turns the speakers into flat representations, but, as shall be seen, it also speaks to the performative dimension that is inherent in the constitution of national subjectivity.

The narrator's ridicule of the couple's speech is further demonstrated in the cited dialogue that follows, of their garbled Hebrew love discourse:

"— תאכל שוקולאדה, תאכל.
— למה שזה בריא בשביל הלב? אני לא חופצ!
— אז היא הולכת לדודה שלה?
— אני לא יושנת שמה; אני באה להנה.
— אז לא תשכח, אני בא אחריה בחצי התשיעית, תמיד איפה שהיא הולכת, אז גם אני הולך.
— הוא עושה לי כואב ואני נותנת לו נשיקה.
לשון־קודש נחמדה זו אפשר לשמוע מפיהם בכל ערב …"[14]

"—Have a piece chocolate, have.
—Why 'cause it's good for me? I don't want none!
—So, when was you going to your aunt already?
—I wasn't sleeping there. I was coming to here.
—You should only don't forget, I'll pick you up a quarter to nine, wherever you go, me too.
—You make me a little hurt and I give you a little kiss.
This lovely Holy Tongue could be heard in their conversation every evening …"[15]

The dialogue is intentionally awkward and filled with grammatical errors. Redundant prepositions are added (*le-henah* instead of *henah*, "to here" instead of "here"); verbs are conjugated incorrectly (*yoshenet* instead of *yeshenah*, *oseh li ko'ev* instead of *makh'iv li*); and the speakers misuse words and employ the pseudo-formal, Yiddish-inflected third person and future tense to address one another. It is not surprising that much of the dialogue revolves around the speakers' bodies (the mentioning of eating and sleeping, hurting and kissing). Brenner's representation of Hebrew speech is often interwoven with excessive or inappropriate sexual desire.[16] A free and overly self-confident use of Hebrew, as demonstrated by the two lovers, signals sexual promiscuity. Indeed, in the following page, a comment is made on the "corrupted and disoriented […] soul" of the promiscuous younger generation *("Ha-periẓut shel ha-dor ha-zeh! Ha-periẓut ha-mekhalah et ha-nefesh ve-goremet le-pizur ha-nefesh")*.[17] Coded in this way, the scene is read as a sensational linguistic and bodily spectacle.

What is most striking about this dialogue, however, is the narrator's attempt to mimic and accurately convey the artificiality of "non-native" speech. He does so in a language that is only just beginning to develop

14 Brener, Shkhol ve-kishalon, 1636.
15 Brenner, Breakdown and Bereavement, 208 f. The translation of the last sentence is by the author.
16 Roni Henig, Stammering Hebrew.
17 Brener, Shkhol ve-kishalon, 1637; Brenner, Breakdown and Bereavement, 209.

its colloquial standards, a language that in reality lacks stable colloquial models that might be emulated in literature, and is therefore non-native by definition. Hence the awkwardness of the conversation can only be measured against a literary standard of a Hebrew dialogue, in relation to which the "realistic" colloquial dialogue falls short. This inverted mimesis, as it were, unsettles the very possibility of literary representation.

That attempt to mimic non-native spoken language is all the more striking considering that the scene is narrated through free indirect discourse, combining the narrator's voice with that of Kahanowitz, Shneirson's friend and roommate. Kahanowitz is described earlier in the novel as a former yeshiva of Telz student, who has failed to be admitted to the secular seminar for teachers in Ḥolon and therefore suffers from "intellectual insecurity."[18] He is further said to be particularly interested in "the irony in human thought and behavior."[19] With an air of bitterness for his own failures, he then shares his reflections on his friend's latest romance willingly and with a "tongue [that] had become more and more biting."[20] Although the anecdote is narrated in the third person, the conversational manner in which it is told is evident. Kahanowitz's voice could be heard through breaks in the narrative and brief bracketed comments ("pardon, this too was another story!"), and his colloquial interventions interrupt the narrator's proper speech. Kahanowitz seems to take pleasure in revealing the irony in his friend's behavior. Yet, as the narrator makes clear, Kahanowitz himself is riddled with contradictions. Immediately after citing the dialogue between Shneirson and the Sephardic girl, the narrator comments:

> "כאן, אמנם, היה אפשר להקשות על מספר־האמת בעצמו: למה הוא משנה תוכן־סיפורו על פי סיבה חיצונית, במעמדו של שניאורסון או היעדרו בשעת מעשה? […] גם אצלו אצל כהנוביץ אין מחסור בסתירות."[21]

> "Of course one could hoist Kahanowitz [in the Hebrew text: the truth-teller] by his own petard: wasn't it just as ironic of him to vary his story depending on whether Shneirson was present or not? […] Kahanowitz himself was the first to admit that he was full of contradictions."[22]

The "truth-teller," who aspires to expose the couple's lie, is now presented as an unreliable narrator, whose story shifts and is fundamentally unstable.

18 Brenner, Breakdown and Bereavement, 60.
19 Brenner, Breakdown and Bereavement, 207.
20 Brenner, Breakdown and Bereavement, 207.
21 Brener, Shkhol ve-kishalon, 1637.
22 Brenner, Breakdown and Bereavement, 209.

In other words, through this seemingly marginal anecdote of Hebrew speaking, the third-person narrator of *Shkhol ve-kishalon* points at another third-person narrator's unreliability. An obsessive concern with contradictory behavior and insincere expression, it turns out, is not a guarantee for genuine narration or truth-telling. Instead, the story ends with questioning the storyteller himself, moving away from the narrative to the problem of its narration.

That the story itself, which revolves around the lie of speaking Hebrew, is imparted to the readers in Hebrew, duplicates the irony once again. Ridiculing the couple's attempt to "pass" as effortless Hebrew speakers and mimicking their awkward conversation, the narrator of *Shkhol ve-kishalon* is engaging in a similar lie, what Schachter has named the "linguistic fiction in the novel,"[23] that is, its Hebrew narration. The multiple ironies that this story reveals therefore become referential of the novel's mode of narration, as if the narrator inserts this comedic scene to question the validity of his own narrative and signals that he himself should not be trusted. But what happens when a critical narrative, driven by impassionate commitment to the revelation of contradictions and to sincere expression, produces a mirror image which doubles the lie it initially exposed? Rather than contesting the practice of Hebrew writing, Brenner reveals the lie and by the same token participates in its reproduction and dissemination.

We are left with nothing but a glance into the workings of an ideological linguistic fantasy and its inherently fictional nature, which fits in with the novel's broader apparatus of meaning-making. *Shkhol ve-kishalon* repeatedly demonstrates how the meaning of things, always subjected to a Zionist grand narrative, is uncontrollably diverted to the realms of sentimentality and cliché. That signification mode, which is associated with the territory of Palestine and its ideologically motivated Jewish inhabitants, operates on different levels of the text. The Yishuv emerges as an ideological space that abstracts singularities and turns them into representational signs; particularities translate inadvertently into generic symbols. Members of the agricultural group, for instance, are ironically depicted in the novel as idealistic men and women, "who bore the world's burdens on their shoulders and judged everything in terms of the group." Infected with what the narrator calls "the ailment of collectivity"[24] (*"negu'ey maḥalot-ha-kelal"*), they interpret every detail of their daily existence as standing for a broader ideological cause: "If one of them traveled abroad, for example, he had not simply gone someplace else, but had 'given up' and 'betrayed the

23 Schachter, Diasporic Modernisms, 73.
24 Brener, Shkhol ve-kishalon, 1453 (translation by the author).

ideal'; if someone stood guard in a vineyard he was not just a lookout, but a 'watchman in the fatherland.'"[25]

This pompous inflating of trivial or arbitrary practices and their conversion into components of an ideological myth is indicative of the reductive processes of meaning-making that are fundamental to the story. Such processes are ubiquitous in the novel. They are particularly evident when it comes to names and naming. Shneirson, for instance, who is also introduced as a snarky name-giving individual, "felt obliged to transfix [every new person that he met] with a piercing glance, staring intently and at length as though to probe him to the bone until he had divined his true nature and could define it with a single word."[26] The somewhat violent practice of reducing a person to a single-word definition is typical of the mechanism of signification described above. Similarly, the protagonist, Yehezkel Hefetz, is said to have had an "entirely different" name when he was spending time in Western Europe, a name that was "not in the least prophetic or oriental or Palestinian."[27] Hefetz's Hebrew name is given to him (we do not know exactly by whom, or under which circumstances) upon his arrival in Palestine. His first name invokes the mysterious biblical prophet, while his last name (literally an object, but also a want, a desire) alludes to the objectifying act of naming.[28]

The imperative to speak Hebrew, which the narrative not only represents but also performs, thus becomes entwined with the regime of signification that governs the novel. Hebrew speaking in the national territory diverts meaning in the service of a nationalist narrative. Yet, in its awkwardness and exaggerated theatricality, Hebrew speaking also points at the absurd of this logic of signification. It thereby opens a gap in a seemingly natural process of linguistic and nationalist identification. Rather than affirming the identities of its speakers, it unsettles them, highlighting their inherent instability. It is not a coincidence that mental breakdown and psychosis are central themes in the novel. The contours of subjectivity are rendered particularly mutable throughout *Shkhol ve-kishalon*, and a stable recognition of the self, let alone via the practice of genuine linguistic expression, becomes impossible.

This mutability of subjectivity, however, is experienced in the novel in its duality, at once traumatic and potentially liberating. For Brenner not only

25 Brener, Shkhol ve-kishalon, 1453; Brenner, Breakdown and Bereavement, 15.
26 Brener, Shkhol ve-kishalon, 1499; Brenner, Breakdown and Bereavement, 61.
27 Brener, Shkhol ve-kishalon, 1456; Brenner, Breakdown and Bereavement, 17.
28 Gluzman has shown that the name Hefetz (*ḥefeẓ* means "object") is emblematic of the protagonist's drama of identity, which is manifested in his subjection to Zionist ideology and the gaze of the group. Gluzman, Ha-guf ha-ẓiyoni, 163.

mourns the loss of the sense of self that follows from the Zionist demand to transform Jewish subjectivity. Hebrew speech does not emerge in the novel as mere lament for the no-longer-retrievable integrity of the self, or for the loss of Yiddish as a language of trust and intimacy. Rather, the artificiality of Hebrew uproots the very assumption of nativity in language. Through Hebrew speaking, both language and identity are revealed in their performativity as theatrical gestures, random sounds and voices fundamentally disconnected from their speakers. In this respect, the novel disrupts any possibility of a native tongue.

Towards the end of the novel, another Hebrew-speaking couple—a nameless young man and woman from the so-called National School—happens to pass the narrative by. Their "conversation," in which the man speaks and the woman remains silent, revolves around beauty and art. In his attempt to convey the beauty of the land, the man resorts to the words of his literature teacher, who has proclaimed that poets and artists find beauty everywhere. But his mimicking speech fails, and his words fall flat:

> "העלם אומר דברים בשם אומרם ובשם עצמו ועובד עבודה קשה בפיו. הוא אינו מדבר — הוא מקשקש וצועק ונתקל באיזו ביטויים זרים, אי־טבעיים, על איזו אמנים, משוררים, סופרים, על איזו נופים יפים נחמדים בירושלים הישנה … הישָנה … — צלצול־דברים ויסוד בנפש להם אין. רק המלה 'נחמד' יוצאת בהנאה אמיתית וכתיקונה. אכן תתברך אותה מלה, הנותנת את האפשרות להשתמש בצלצולה המיוחד."[29]

> "The young man struggles with his mouth to express his own and his teacher's thoughts. He is not speaking, rather he babbles and shouts at the top of his voice, stumbling upon foreign, unnatural phrases, about artists, poets, authors, about some beautiful, lovely landscapes in Old … Old Jerusalem … Chimes of words that do not spring from the soul. Only the word 'lovely' comes out genuinely, with sincere joy. Bless this word that allows one to utter its unique sound."[30]

Contrary to the previous scene of Hebrew speaking, in which Shneirson and the Sephardic girl are said to be carried away in the blissful ignorance of their boisterous love discourse, the Hebrew conversation of the anonymous couple from the National School demonstrates an anxious hyperawareness to the factitious nature of Hebrew speech. It is a type of speaking that either dissolves into silence (as in the case of the woman), or lays bare everything that proper speech is meant to keep hidden: the physical labor in uttering hard syllables, the struggle to link words to their referents, their disinte-

29 Brener, Shkhol ve-kishalon, 1667.
30 The translation of this fragment is by the author. For Halkin's version see Brenner, Breakdown and Bereavement, 242 f.

gration into meaningless sounds, the artificial dimension of speech, the foreignness that is always inherent in language, and the noticeable effort to make speech appear fluent and natural nevertheless. For the narrator, the young man's discourse amounts to "not speaking."[31] His Hebrew speech collapses into eccentric bodily gestures. He is incapable of capturing in words the beauty of the landscapes of Jaffa and Old Jerusalem. His speech therefore fails him precisely in his attempt to sing the praise of the land.

And yet, unexpected sincerity emerges in the midst of that mechanical exhibition of Hebrew speaking. The word *neḥmad*—which can be translated as an adjective (lovely, pleasant, nice), but also as a verb (coveted, desired)[32]—stands out in its peculiar resonance. This word captures not only linguistic beauty, but a sincere sensuous and desiring relation to language, perhaps a wish, albeit unfulfilled, to inhabit it, to dwell in it. That very same word is employed by the narrator earlier, as he cites the dialogue between Shneirson and the Sephardic girl, commenting ironically that "this lovely [*neḥmadah*] Holy Tongue could be heard in their conversation every evening."[33] With this word, the two scenes of failed attempts at Hebrew speaking become linked and mirror one another. Whereas the first depiction is comic, the second is somber. In the first, the lovers give in to the drama, playing their role despite being seemingly aware of the linguistic spectacle. In the second, hyper self-awareness leads to hesitation, self-doubt, and silence. Yet, it is in this second rendering of a failed Hebrew dialogue that the narrator instructs us to consider another reading of the scene, one in which the word *neḥmad* is deployed not ironically but genuinely, uttering at once a desiring relation to language and "sincere joy" at the playfulness of its artificiality. For in the pretense and disguise of a dysfluent language, replete with foreign idioms, also lies a sincerity that could only be captured momentarily by the non-native brokenness of Hebrew speech.

31 Translation by the author. For Halkin's version see Brenner, Breakdown and Bereavement, 242 f.

32 The root *ḥ—m—d* appears in this meaning in Exodus, 20:17, and Psalms, 11:19, for instance.

33 Translation by the author. For Halkin's version, see Brenner, Breakdown and Bereavement, 209.

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Dvoyre Fogel

ANASTASIYA LYUBAS

A Yiddish Modernist from Lwów: Dvoyre Fogel

"This book is the ultimate modern book from Europe. […] Its new tone and style, truthful and singular, makes me think that Lwów is very close to New York,"[1] wrote the New York-based poet and critic Arn Glants-Leyeles about Dvoyre Fogel's first poetry collection *Tog-figurn. Lider* (Day Figures. Poems, 1930). Who was this author, whose writing evoked such high praise? And how did she come to write in Yiddish, unlike anyone else?

When Dvoyre Fogel (Debora Vogel) published *Tog-figurn*, she was thirty years old. A newly minted PhD in philosophy and professor of literature and psychology at Jakob Rotman's Hebrew Teachers' Seminary in Lwów, she launched her career as a writer and art critic after traveling to Berlin and Stockholm in 1927/28. In 1929, she joined the board of the Jewish Literature and Arts Society in Lwów and became a contributor and editor of the arts section for *Tsushtayer* (Contribution), a Yiddish-language journal of literature, arts, and culture. Around the same time, she began publishing in Polish and in Yiddish.

Two years after obtaining her PhD, Fogel's publication list included more than a dozen essays about art exhibitions, reviews of Soviet Ukrainian film, theatrical productions, and poetry—all written in Yiddish—and half a dozen Polish-language articles about children and youth pedagogy. This extremely erudite, well-rounded, and accomplished essayist was now also entering the world of Yiddish literature (**fig. 1**).

Fogel's decision to write in Yiddish and her poetic debut in this language were not self-evident. Her correspondence with her uncle Mordecai (Marcus) Ehrenpreis (1869–1951), the chief rabbi of Stockholm, was partly in German and even shows evidence of Fogel's attempt to write early experimental German poetry.[2] She also penned essays on Polish Jewish artists (for example, on Bruno Schulz[3]) in German. The essays were later

1 Arn Glants-Leyeles, Dvoyre Fogel, in: Undzer Bukh 3 (1930), 67 f., here 67.
2 Dvoyre Vogel's letter to Marcus Ehrenpreis from 2 May 1924, cit. in Blooming Spaces. The Collected Poetry, Prose, Critical Writing, and Letters of Debora Vogel, transl., ed., and with an introduction by Anastasiya Lyubas, Boston, Mass., 2020, 285.
3 This article appeared in *Judisk Tidskrift* in November 1930.

In Their Surroundings, 95–104 | doi.org/10.13109/9783666306112.95

Fig. 1: Dvoyre Fogel, undated.

published in Swedish translation in *Judisk Tidskrift* (Jewish Journal), a Stockholm journal of Jewish literature, art, news, research, and critique which was dedicated to showing Jewish culture as central to European culture in general. Fogel published essays in Polish, and her university education (including doctoral program) was in Polish with some German as well. Yiddish was Fogel's fourth language after Polish, Hebrew, and German.

In 1900, Fogel was born into a family of *maskilim*, proponents of the Jewish enlightenment, or Haskalah, in Bursztyn, a small town in eastern

Poland (now Burshtin in western Ukraine). Her parents, Anselm Vogel and Lea Ehrenpreis, were educators, the father being the principal of a Hebrew-language high school and the mother a teacher at a high school for girls. Shortly after their daughter's birth, the family moved to Lwów (called Lemberg at the time), a multicultural city where Fogel lived and worked most of her life. There the family oversaw the orphanage for Jewish children where Dvoyre also taught and led a reading club.

Fogel's family moved for a short period of time from Lemberg to Vienna in order to avoid the anti-Jewish violence in the wake of World War I. In Vienna, Dvoyre attended the German-speaking high school and graduated. Shortly afterwards, she embarked upon her studies of Polish language and literature, psychology, and philosophy at the Jan Kazimierz University in Lwów. She was mentored by the founder of the Lwów-Warsaw School of analytical philosophy, Kazimierz Twardowski (1866–1938), a famous pedagogue who influenced the work of phenomenologist Edmund Husserl and a whole generation of Polish analytical philosophers. In Twardowski's seminar, Fogel wrote about the notion of artistic form, an interest which became pronounced in her subsequent doctoral work.

Fogel pursued graduate studies at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. Her dissertation focused on the cognitive value of art in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's aesthetics and in the work of Polish art historian, philosopher, aesthetician, and psychologist Józef Kremer. The principal tenet of Fogel's thesis posits that Hegel and Kremer bestow analogous roles on philosophy and art. Art, like philosophy, partakes in the cognition of the world in Fogel's reading of the two thinkers.

After the defense of her dissertation, Fogel spent several months, from mid-October 1926 until early January 1927, in Berlin. She then went to Stockholm to visit her uncle Marcus Ehrenpreis and his family and travelled to Paris sometime later. Each of the cities made its way into her work. Berlin appears as the city of film and advertisements, Parisian landmarks mix with kitsch and high art, and impressionist depictions of Stockholm include architecture, the city's waterfront, and painting.

Cubist and Constructivist Influences and Bold Approach to *Shund*

Around 1928, Dvoyre Fogel began her journey into Yiddish letters. The following year, she first published her poetry in this language. It might come as a surprise that she learned Yiddish as an adult under the influence of her university friend Rachel Auerbach (Rokhl Oyerbakh), a staunch

Yiddishist. Not only did Fogel learn Yiddish and started actively writing in it, but she also began to push the limits of language in her writing.

In the preface to *Tog-figurn*, Fogel admitted to Cubist and Constructivist influences which she sought to transplant from visual arts into her poetry, "I consider my poetry to be an attempt at a new style. I find analogies to modern painting in these poems."[4] (fig. 2) Itsik Shvarts (Y. Kara), the Romanian Yiddish writer, director of the State Yiddish Theater in Iași, and a friend of Itsik Manger, took note of Fogel's unique style in his review of her first collection: "Dadaism, Constructivism, and the like were rare guests in our literature, and Cubism likewise. Hence our interest in Debora Vogel's poetic experiment to create a Yiddish Cubist lyric. A singular and to a large extent a successful experiment."[5]

Fogel crafted concrete constructions of geometrical shape—a square, ellipsis, rectangle, and circle—out of affects of boredom, longing, melancholy, and happiness. She gave a name to her new poetic form: lyric of cool stasis. Such lyric stood in stark contrast to dynamism prevalent in many avant-garde movements of the day. The poet developed the notion of static lyricism in her essay *Statik, dinamik un aktualitet in der kunst* (Stasis, Dynamism, and Topicality in Art): "[S]tasis in my framework is a result and [an] ultimate stage of abundance and dynamism, the content of all dynamic colorfulness and warmth, which it simply regulates and balances."[6] She understood stasis and dynamism in a dialectical fashion—as interconnected. Fogel further asserted that poetry of stasis underscored this dialectical relationship. The lyric of stasis is not identical to stasis itself, it is "rather quite distinct from the stasis […], from the material where it originates, the monotony of a couple of repeated gestures in life."[7] Raw material (stasis, grayness, or monotony) does not equal the product (dynamism, colorfulness, and rhythm).

In *Vayse verter in der dikhtung* (White Words in Poetry), which she wrote in 1930, the year of publication of *Tog-figurn*, Fogel noted that banal, meaningless, and repeatable expressions—white words—condense "the utmost stillness, the renunciation of illusory possibilities, the sweetness of stasis."[8] The term "white words" was inspired by the celebrated

4 Debora Vogel, Preface to the "Day Figures" Collection, in: Blooming Spaces, 123f., here 123.

5 Itsik Shvarts, Modernist Poetry (On Debora Vogel's "Day Figures. Poems." Lviv: Tsushtayer, 1930), in: Blooming Spaces, 343–347, here 344.

6 Debora Vogel, Stasis, Dynamism, and Topicality in Art (1936), in: Blooming Spaces, 16–21, here 17.

7 Vogel, Stasis, Dynamism, and Topicality in Art (1936), 17.

8 Debora Vogel, White Words in Poetry (1931), in: Blooming Spaces, 3–11, here 8.

Polish Jewish Romantic poet Cyprian Kamil Norwid (1821–1883) and his cohesive prose cycles *Czarne kwiaty* (Black Flowers) and *Białe kwiaty* (White Flowers). In *Białe kwiaty*, Norwid outlined a theory of silence, absence, and tragedy deprived of pathos. Fogel's "white words," like Norwid's "white flowers," communicate "utmost stillness," "renunciation of […] possibilities," and stasis.

The term originated in a comparison between the impersonality of words and expressions and "the white color on the palette, or basso in after music."[9] To explicate what she meant, Fogel provided examples of "white words" and expressions in the essay: "it was as it had to be," "you live only once," "and nothing ever happens," "everything should be as is," and others. In Fogel's view, while these expressions are anonymous, trite, and abound in speech, they are renewed when used in poetry. Fogel quotes from Yiddish modernist poets like Arn Glants-Leyeles and Moyshe Kulbak to prove her point. Poetic rehabilitation of banal expressions is a result of repetition which creates difference. To Fogel, this was not merely a theory. In her poetry, she emphasized iteration, so that colorfulness could emerge out of gray and white and rhythm could appear out of monotony.

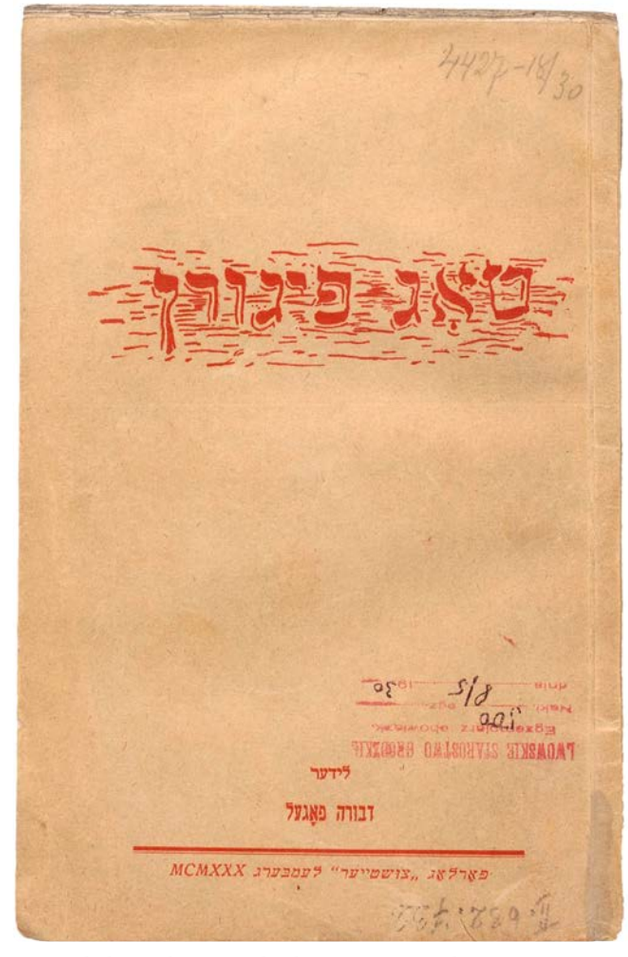

Fig. 2: The collection of poems *Tog-figurn*, published in 1930 in Lwów by Farlag Tsushtayer.

Fogel's second poetic creation, *Manekinen. Lider* (Mannequins. Poems, 1934) took on slightly different themes than her debut collection. Unlike *Tog-figurn* with its repeatability of geometrical figures and linguistic

9 Vogel, White Words in Poetry (1931), 9.

expressions, this volume engaged with the notion of *shund*, "trash," or the lowbrow in literary and theatrical jargon. Making use of mass and middlebrow culture and converting it into high modernist poetry was at stake in this work. Sensational plots of potboilers and flat narratives about unhappy love and romantic adventures, spotlight on the conventionally marginalized figures of streetwalkers, shoddy ballads sung in bars, and mannequins or dolls advertising consumer goods in shop windows—are transformed through Fogel's writing.

The poet limned the theme of urbanism and particularly gendered experience of the urban space. Female figures dressed according to latest fashion trends are eerily reminiscent of porcelain dolls which are wound up and as if dancing a mechanical ballet. Fogel's synesthesia, the commingling of senses, is at work. Not only is the author attentive to materiality, choreography, and theatrical performativity, but she also demonstrates her indebtedness to visuality and comments on the nature of representation of female corporeality and sexuality in contemporary culture and in Western aesthetics through centuries, as in the poem *Lyalkes* (Dolls):

> She was kneaded
> from red porcelain dough
> of women's bodies by Rubens
> and seduces with two pink breast-apples
> as if with round shiny eyes.
>
> With half-open eyes
> the porcelain smiled
> smooth and watery, as if enchanted
> by everything which happens in the world
> on the second, the other side of the window.
>
> And on the other side of shop window
> elastic dolls stroll
> with sweet long almonds of eyes
> and agile hands and feet.
>
> Dolls with a movable heart
> carry glassy pupils of eyes under eyelashes with mascara
> and a carmine smile of Chameleon brand
> and faces of smiling porcelain.[10]

10 Debora Vogel, Dolls, in: Blooming Spaces, 182.

Fogel's Montage Prose and Rich Essayist Contributions

Unlike Fogel's poetry, which is written exclusively in Yiddish, her prose is bilingual. The prose collection *Akatsyes blien. Montazhn* (1935), also published as *Akacje kwitną. Montaże* (1936; both Acacias Bloom. Montages), stages an experiment in literary montage in Polish and in Yiddish. With slight differences between the two versions, Fogel presents a vision of building or constructing the world—prevalent in modernist works—in the first part of the tripartite collection, *Boy fun banstantsye/Budowa stacji kolejowej* (The Building of the Train Station, written in 1931). In two other parts of the collection, *Akatsyes blien/Akacje kwitną* (Acacias Bloom) and *Blumengesheftn mit atsalen/Kwiaciarnie z azaliami* (Flower Shops with Azaleas), written in 1932 and 1933 respectively, Fogel conveys mundane and seemingly insignificant events (fashion trends), natural phenomena (blossoming of acacias), and feelings which usually belong to the private realm (melancholic reflections on life) in their interconnectedness with events of public life and social phenomena that usually receive prime attention (e. g., economic crisis, military exercises, mass unemployment). By showing all events simultaneously, in cuts from a variety of angles, Fogel did away with the hierarchy of events. In *Di literarishe gatung montazh* (Montage as a Literary Genre, 1937), she shone the light on her practice of literary montage and the linkages between the significant and insignificant events which it makes possible. According to her, montage "allows for empty spaces between situations, in much the same way as they occur in life."[11]

Besides her published prose and poetry collections, Fogel contributed poems, essays, and prose pieces to Yiddish-, Polish-, and Swedish-language periodicals. The venues were geographically and thematically diverse: Fogel wrote among others for *Bodn* (Terrain), *Inzl* (Island) and *Inzikh* (Introspective), both based in New York, *Lid* (Poem) in Los Angeles, *Shoybn* (Windowpanes) in Bucharest, *Judisk Tidskrift* in Stockholm, *Nasza Opinia* (Our Opinion), *Sygnały* (Signals), *Przegląd Społeczny* (Social Review), *Chwila* (Moment) in Lwów, and *Literarishe Bleter* (Literary Pages) in Warsaw (fig. 3). In addition to essays on poetics, she was prolific in art criticism discussing individual artists, artistic groups, and exhibitions. She also wrote essays about applied arts and typography of children's books, reviews of fashion shows, articles on pedagogy and the role of progressive intellectuals in society, and investigated the problematic nature of racism

11 Debora Vogel, Montage as a Literary Genre (1937), in: Blooming Spaces, 29–34, here 29.

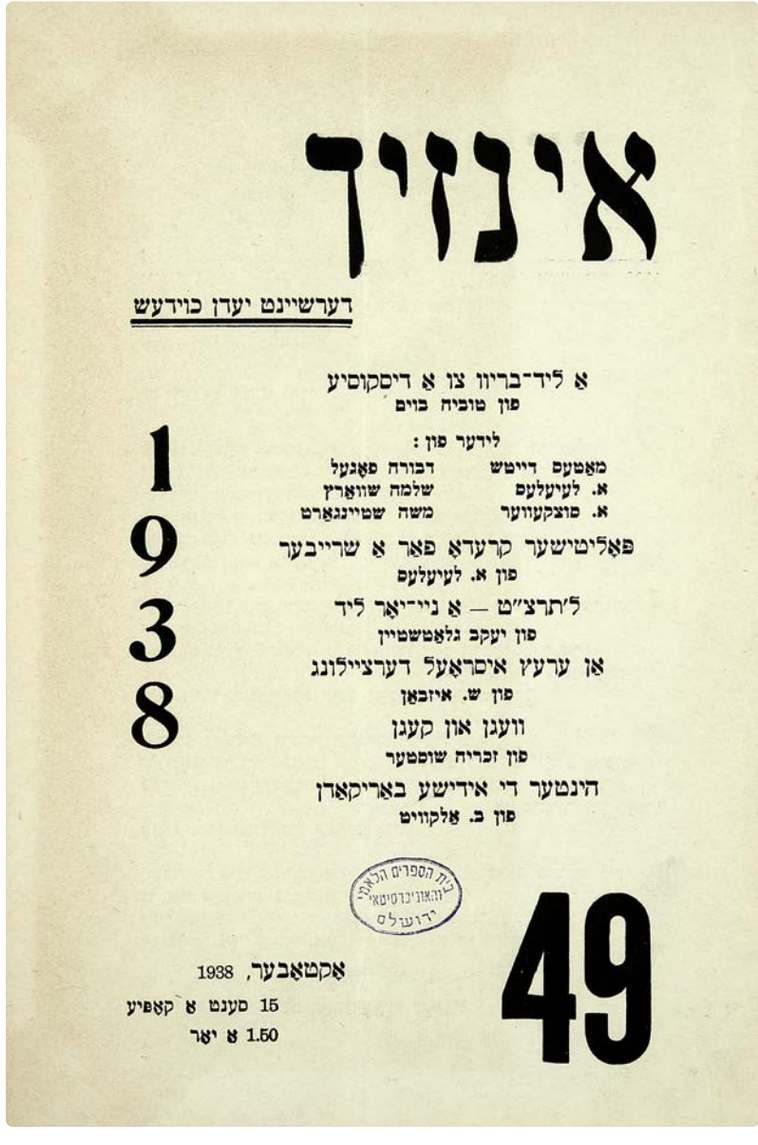

Fig. 3: Cover of the journal *Inzikh*, published in New York, with a contribution by Dvoyre Fogel.

and antisemitism. Fogel dedicated several articles to promoting awareness of Yiddish literature and drawing attention to writers from her own intellectual milieu in Poland, as well as reporting about the currents of Yiddish modernist literature in America. She translated the works of Introspectivists, the New York-based Yiddish high modernists, gave talks about Yiddish modernism, and published about the history of writing in Yiddish in Galicia.

During the last years of her life, Fogel was busy working on a collection of prose that would further develop her experiments in *Akatsyes blien/Akacje kwitną*. She also intended to publish a collection of critical essays. She continued to write poetry in the pacifist vein that was printed in the New York journal *Inzikh* before the outbreak of World War II. Her plans for more works were sadly not realized. Dvoyre Fogel perished together with her husband Shalom, her six-year-old son Asher, and her mother Lea in 1942 during the so-called Nazi deportation *Aktion* in the Ghetto Lemberg. She was only forty-two years old.

Dvoyre Fogel's impressive legacy testifies to the artist who created unique avant-garde poetics at the limit of visual and literary culture, a singular poetics imbued with intellectual rigor that deserves to be read today.

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ANNA MAJA MISIAK

Now Is Before and After: The Suspension of Time in Dvoyre Fogel's Cycle *Mide kleyder* (Tired Dresses, 1925–1929)

"Life" and "form" have been keywords in the works of the poet Dvoyre Fogel (1900–1942), who spent most of her life in the Habsburg city of Lemberg (Lwów after 1918, today Lviv). These concepts were not just derived from her philological and philosophical studies: As an educator in the Jewish orphanage of Lwów, she spent two decades engaging with developmental psychology, especially the influence of literature and the fine arts on the development of personality. As an internationally connected art critic and cocreator of Galicia's artistic life, she was inspired by different movements of avant-garde art. She explored these in essays, exhibition reports, and artist portraits, moreover using them as the building blocks for her own poems and montages.

The Birth of Form from Life

Dvoyre Fogel knew just how topical and formally groundbreaking her texts were. In a letter to Arn Glants-Leyeles dated 27 February 1933, she confessed to her ability to "capture the essential contemporary dialectic of life within the dialectic of your artwork."[1] On 18 October 1935, she wrote to him about the process of continual unfolding of one form from another, which enabled her to gradually fathom "the wonderful dialectic of forms and life in their development."[2] In a letter to Meylekh Ravitsh dated 20 March 1936, she wrote that her poems were "no surface 'experiments,'

1 Debora Vogel's letter to Aaron Glantz-Leyeles from 27 February 1933, cit. in Blooming Spaces. The Collected Poetry, Prose, Critical Writing, and Letters of Debora Vogel, transl., ed. and with an introduction by Anastasiya Lyubas, Boston, Mass., 2020, 295.

2 Debora Vogel's letter to Aaron Glantz-Leyeles from 18 October 1935, in: Blooming Spaces, 299–301, here 301.

In Their Surroundings, 105–123 | doi.org/10.13109/9783666306112.105

but extracts from life and experiences for which I paid a high price, and which lead only to this form, not to another."[3]

Dvoyre Fogel perceived the poetic form in imaginary images, in the "colorfulness [of] strong metaphors."[4] She wanted to elicit not only poetic but also material strength from language and to compose poetry using the monotonous rhythm of word repetitions, analogous to modern painting. Following analytical Cubism and Constructivism, Dvoyre Fogel dared undertake an attempt at form that she called "a lyric of cool stasis and geometrical ornamentality" in the preface to her first volume of poetry, *Tog-figurn. Lider* (Day Figures. Poems, 1930).[5] Fogel ascribed to words the roles of line and color. However, since words were full of meaning and connected to life much more so than visual artistic elements, they could only achieve the desired artistic combinations through reduction to the simple and monotonous. Fogel's radical search for new forms of language from forms of life as well as her thoughts on the consumption of forms as a sign of the abrasion and transformation of worldviews echo the hypotheses of the German art sociologist Lu Märten, who interpreted art as a "luxury of form" and therefore consistently grounded her art theory in the concept of form.[6]

In June 1926, Dvoyre Fogel defended her dissertation, entitled *Der Erkenntniswert der Kunst bei Hegel und dessen Modifikationen vom polnischen Denker Joseph Kremer* (The Epistemic Value of Art in Hegel and His Modifications of the Polish Thinker Joseph Kremer), at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. She was not just an accomplished expert on Hegel, however. In the first half of the 1920s, she attended seminars held at the Jan Kazimierz University in Lwów by Kazimierz Twardowski, the founder of the Lwów-Warsaw School, by Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz, the principal logician of this philosophical school, and by Mścisław Wartenberg, a renowned Kantian and neo-Kantian in Lwów. She submitted a paper about Kant under his supervision that won her a prize, and under Twardowski she wrote the essay *Określenie pojęcia formy w sztuce* (On the Concept of Form in Art). In the postscript to her second volume of poetry, entitled *Manekinen. Lider* (Mannequins. Poems, 1934), Fogel remarked that Hegel's dialectic method formed the basis for the development of her own formal language. Proceeding from a "decorative arrangement of life without the residue of events,"[7] from waiting for "finished things," waiting for things "to come," she created a dialectical triad: the thesis of transgressing and dissolving the boundary between the automated-mechanical and the animate-fleshly principles; the subsequent antithesis of "the tragedy of monotony and the arch-scheme of the rectangle";[8] and the synthetic rehabilitation of the achievable and the possible that emerges from the union of these antitheses, which Fogel equated with monotony, shoddy, and kitsch and which she called "life."[9] Fogel used quotation marks deliberately to signal when a particular term had become hackneyed and degenerated to a clichéd interpretation of a thing, to a habitually used name. In her essay for the *Gazeta Artystów* (Artists' Newspaper) of the Kraków avant-garde, Fogel elucidated the clichéd and estranged term "life" as a compositional element of ever greater significance for life, as the dialectic of form enabled a dialectic of life.[10] This text evinces several parallels to the dialectical materialism of Lu Märten, especially in the organic connection between life forms and art forms.[11] Lu Märten interpreted the tradition of songs—the drinking song, among other things—as the "tradition of life," emphasizing that the new power and the fantastic lay in the real and the unpoetic.[12] Fogel perceived in this poetic concept of creation a bridge between the literary and the visual, as she explained in one of her texts about Marc Chagall: The inner poetic substance of the everyday and the ostensible naivety of the world of things are not merely a reflection of the reality (of life), but rather the formation and expression of a worldview. Great art is in this sense always intellectual (programmatic and deliberate), organically combining light-heartedness with tragedy. In this respect, Fogel overrode Lu Märten's thesis of art as a luxury, pointing out that art was indispensable to life in its sense of an eternal, banal shoddy ballad; it reminded the individual of the difficult but wondrous duty to live.[13]

3 Debora Vogel's letter to Melekh Ravitch from 20 March 1936, in: Blooming Spaces, 305f., here 305.

4 Debora Vogel's letter to Aaron Glantz-Leyeles from 16 July 1937, in: Blooming Spaces, 324–326, here 325.

5 Debora Vogel, Preface to the "Day Figures" Collection, in: Blooming Spaces, 123f., here 124.

6 Lu Märten, Wesen und Veränderung der Formen und Künste. Resultate historisch-materialistischer Untersuchungen, Frankfurt a.M. 1924, 20. Fogel first mentioned the hypothesis of the constant abrasion of old art forms and the replacement of art through utilitarian forms in the late 1930s. It has to date not been confirmed whether she had already read Märten's work in the second half of the 1920s.

7 Debora Vogel, Afterword to "Mannequins," in: Blooming Spaces, 216f., here 216.

8 Vogel, Afterword to "Mannequins," 217.

9 Vogel, Afterword to "Mannequins," 217.

10 Dvoyre Fogel, Temat w sztuce [The Theme in the Arts], in: Gazeta Artystów [Artists' Newspaper] (1935), no. 22, 4.

11 Märten, Wesen und Veränderung der Formen und Künste, 209.

12 Märten, Wesen und Veränderung der Formen und Künste, 233 and 277.

13 Dvoyre Fogel, Marc Chagal (Z okazji 50-lecia urodzin) [Marc Chagall (On the Occasion of His 50th Birthday)], in: Jednodniówka. Żydowski Uniwersytet Ludowy we Lwowie 1937 [Special Issue. The Jewish People's University in Lwów 1937], 20.

The poem cycle *Mide kleyder* (Tired Dresses), written in Yiddish in the mid-1920s and containing 26 poems, was published in 1930 in Dvoyre Fogel's *Tog-figurn* (**fig. 1**). The continuity of the poems in content and form can already be surmised from the list of titles:

> מידקייט | דער אַכטער האַרבסט | די רויטע בלום | ליד פֿון בערנשטיין | האַרבסט־געאָרגינעס | געלער פּייזאַזש | דאָס ראָסט־רויטע קלייד | פֿון דעם האַרבסט־קלייד | אויף אַ טרויער־קלייד | פֿון דער בענקשאַפֿט | קאַרשנרויטע זון | בערג און פֿרוכטן | ליבעס־ליד | *געזעגענען* | אַ ליבע־ליד | מידקייט פֿון וואַרטן | 3 לידער פֿון וואַרטן | פֿערד I | פֿערד II | פֿונם בארג־ווינט | דאָס ליד פֿונם טיַיך | דאָס פּרימיטיווע לעבן | מיַין שטוב | *אַ ליד וועגן אויגן*

> *Midkeyt* | Der akhter harbst | Di royte blum | Lid fun bernshteyn | Harbst-georginyes | Geler peyzazh | Dos rost-royte kleyd | Fun dem harbst-kleyd | Oyf a troyer-kleyd | Fun der benkshaft | Karshnroyte zun | Berg un frukhtn | Libes-lid | *Gezegenen* | A libe-lid | Midkeyt fun vartn | 3 lider fun vartn | Ferd I | Ferd II | Funm barg-vint | Dos lid funm taykh | Dos primitive lebn | Mayn shtub | *A lid vegn oygn*

> *Weariness* | The Eighth Autumn | The Red Flower | The Poem about Amber | Autumn Dahlias | Yellow Landscape | Rusty-Red Dress | About the Autumn Dress | On the Dress of Mourning | On Longing | Cherry-Red Sun | Mountains and Fruit | Love Poem | *Farewell* | A Love Poem | Weariness of Waiting | 3 Poems on Waiting | Horse I | Horse II | Of Mountain Wind | Poem about the River | Primitive Life | My Dwelling | *A Poem about Eyes*[14]

It is unclear to what degree Fogel was inspired by Søren Kierkegaard's dress metaphors when she chose these titles, but it can safely be assumed that she was familiar with the leading Danish anti-Hegelian thinker. Based on metaphorical intertextualities, she presumably knew his work *Repetition*. Kierkegaard compared hope to a new dress, stiff, taut, and shiny, but still unworn and therefore unfitted; he regarded memory as a discarded, equally unfitting item of clothing that had been outgrown; only repetition was like a tight, pliable dress, custom-made and resilient.[15] In the middle of the first part of Fogel's *Mide kleyder*, we find descriptions of three dresses: The first, in *Dos rost-royte kleyd* (Rusty-Red Dress), is autumn-colored and woven from threads of fatigue, each "tired like rust from three and six months of waiting."[16] In this poem, the lyrical self transforms into a tired chestnut tree. The second autumn dress bears the dull golden color of late-blossoming October flowers. *Fun dem harbst-kleyd* (About the Autumn Dress) opens with an image of repeatedly blossoming dahlias and ends in the continuous egress of the self into glass alleyways and its aimless drifting through the city. The third dress, a mourning dress consisting of stiff black material and worn every day, is finally taken off and hidden away; the poem *Oyf a troyer-kleyd* (On the Dress of Mourning) therefore exudes new beginnings. The symbolic act of taking off the dress occurs on the fifteenth day of the month of Tamuz, shortly before the beginning of the fast, the commemoration of the twofold destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, and the days of mourning over exile that follow. The self's strong inner act of will is here contrasted with the external world and aims to change reality from the inside out. The self now intends to smash the grey monoliths of prior time into many days, many months, and many bodies and to claim these for itself.[17]

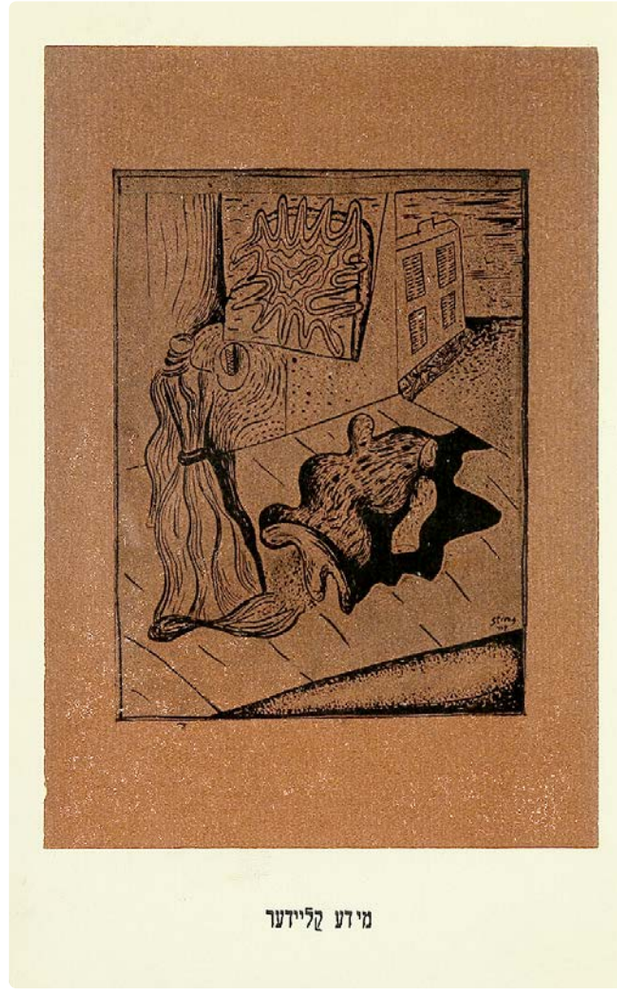


Fig. 1: Illustration of Dvoyre Fogel's *Mide kleyder* by Henryk Streng (Marek Włodarski) in *Tog-figurn*.

14 Emphasis by the author.
15 Søren Kierkegaard, Die Wiederholung, Hamburg 2000 (first publ. 1843), 4.
16 Debora Vogel, Rusty-Red Dress, in: Blooming Spaces, 151.
17 This is reminiscent of the research of the biologist, zoologist, and philosopher Jakob Johann von Uexküll (1864–1944) on the timeframe of perception—the realization that follows concerns the monolithically extended or fragmented and ruffled idiosyncratic time of each lifeform, the time that one creates for oneself and which constitutes the self. See Jakob Johann von Uexküll, Umwelt und Innenwelt der Tiere, Berlin 1909. Fogel was familiar with the writings of Adolf Behne, who repeatedly referred to Uexküll's research findings and analyzed in detail the latter's influence on modern artists.

Fogel consolidated the motif of the three dresses in the second part of the cycle, in the middle text of the triptych *3 lider fun vartn* (3 Poems on Waiting)—the cherry red dress, the rusty golden dress, and the coral red dress are here named again along with the metamorphoses of the self that they instigated: into a tree on a velvety soft evening, into a dull flower in "a month of tired leaves," and into "a cold coral in the glass sea of afternoon streets."[18] The lyrical self addresses the second person retrospectively and ends with thoughts directed at the future:

> איך האָב אויסגעטראָגן
> אַלע קלייַדער
> וואַרטנדיק אויף דיר.
> […]
> קיין מאָל שוין נישט
> וועל איך אַ קלייד פֿאַר דיר נישט אויסטראַכטן.

> Ikh hob oysgetrogn
> ale kleyder
> vartndik oyf dir.
> […]
> Keyn mol shoyn nisht
> vel ikh a kleyd far dir nisht oystrakhtn.
>
> I have worn out
> all my dresses
> waiting for you.
> […]
> Never again
> will I worry what dress to wear for you.[19]

In the following poem, the third about waiting, this statement is immediately revoked:

> איך האָב אויפֿגעהערט
> צו וואַרטן דעם אָוונט. און וואַרט.
> און וואַרט און וואַרט נאָך תּמיד.

> Ikh hob oyfgehert
> tsu vartn dem ovnt. Un vart.
> Un vart un vart nokh tomed.

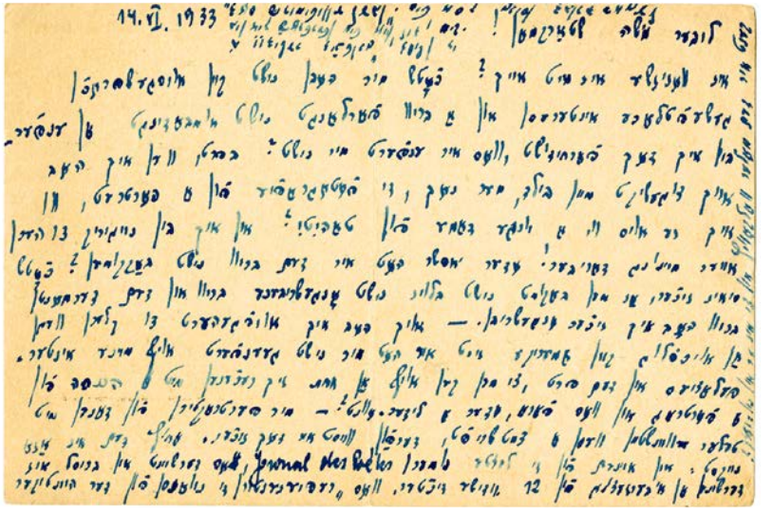
18 Debora Vogel, 3 Poems on Waiting, in: Blooming Spaces, 156–158, here 157.
19 Vogel, 3 Poems on Waiting, 157.

> This evening I stopped
> waiting. Yet I wait.
> Wait and wait still.[20]

For Fogel, as for many Jewish intellectuals from East-Central Europe, the choice of Yiddish as a creative medium was connected to the adoption of one of the linguistic identities available to her and signaled her unequivocal commitment to the cultural heritage of Judaism. To be sure, Fogel did not have a perfect grasp of Yiddish, yet, as a "Hinzugekommene" ("the one who joined later")—as she described herself on 18 October 1935 and on 23 May 1939 in her letters to Glants-Leyeles[21]—she possessed a sound feeling for word coinages. She was moreover able to keep drawing on the vocabulary and literary traditions of her original languages, namely Hebrew, Polish, and German. She used the Yiddish language in an inventive manner and thereby contributed to the emergence of a modern Jewish culture. Not for nothing did she capture the attention of the New York-based Introspectivists with her first publications (figs. 2, 3, and 4). She identified with their views in many respects, such as their love of concrete images, their concentration on the rhythms of language, and not least of all their objection to national

Fig. 2: Postcard by Debora Vogel to Moyshe Shtarkman in New York, lexicographer, editor, and journalist (9 July 1931).

20 Vogel, 3 Poems on Waiting, 157.
21 Debora Vogel's letter to Aaron Glantz-Leyeles from 18 October 1935, 299–301; Debora Vogel's letter to Aaron Glantz-Leyeles from 23 May 1939, in: Blooming Spaces, 336f. For the German quote, see Debora Vogel, Die Geometrie des Verzichts. Gedichte, Montagen, Essays, Briefe, ed. and transl. from the Yidd. and Pol. by Anna Maja Misiak, Wuppertal 2016, 564.



Figs. 3 and 4: Postcards by Debora Vogel to Moyshe Shtarkman in New York (7 July 1932 and 14 June 1933).

motifs in favor of topical issues, particularly when presented in urban space.[22] However, while the Introspectivists searched for subjective truth within themselves, Fogel described the objective with distanced empathy: the functionalization of the gray ornament of the masses and the life of materials. While the authors in New York conceived of monotony as the death of poetry, Fogel turned it into the principle of her new poetics.

22 Benjamin Harshav, The Meaning of Yiddish, Berkeley/Los Angeles, Calif./Oxford 1990, 172 and 177.

The cycle *Mide kleyder* reveals life in its manifold temporal aspects: in sober recitations of calendar cycles, natural phenomena, interior and exterior spaces, and errant bodies, attracting but always eluding each other. The forms of Fogel's literary universe emerged by diving into the essence and pondering the purpose and/or inscrutability of life, in the vein of the stream of life and its unpredictable creative development as outlined by Henri Bergson, whose philosophy is clearly tangible in Fogel's work both in terms of content and form.[23] Fogel spreads out the temporality of being-in-the-world between renunciation and longing. In *Mide kleyder*, being takes place between that which is supposed to come, but probably will not happen anymore, and that which appears possible, but remains equally ineffable.[24] According to Bergson, it is this inner expansion of the fleeting moment into perpetuity that leads to new forms.[25]

From text to text, Fogel repeats, varies, or expands on form, linguistic images, and key verses. This intertwining intensifies the lyrical expression of the entire corpus. The following will focus on three exemplary texts from the beginning, middle, and end of the cycle: *Midkeyt* (Weariness), *Gezegenen* (Farewell), and *A lid vegn oygn* (A Poem about Eyes).

Languishing Time

The cycle *Mide kleyder* opens with the poem *Midkeyt*, a small treatise on how our being-in-the-world manifests itself between that which can only be perceived in the moment and that which is eternally disappearing. Through the wistful being-for-oneself that forms the basic mood of *Midkeyt*, the lyrical self withdraws from reality while at the same time scrutinizing it:

> וואָס קומט דאָס יאָר. וואָס אין צווייטן.
> צו וואָס יאָרן קומענדיקע:
> גאָרנישט קומט נישט.

23 Henri Bergson, Schöpferische Entwicklung, Jena 1912, 48 and 108.

24 See Bergson's "The road we travel in time is strewn with the ruins of all that we began to be, of all that we could have been." and "Everything happens as if a broad stream of consciousness had penetrated matter, loaded—as all consciousness—with an enormous multiplicity of potentialities that penetrated each other": "Der Weg, den wir mit der Zeit durchmessen, ist besät mit den Trümmern alles dessen, was zu sein wir begannen, alles dessen, was wir hätten werden können" und "Alles geht vor sich, als wäre ein breiter Strom von Bewusstsein in die Materie eingedrungen, beladen—wie alles Bewusstsein—mit einer unendlichen Vielheit von Möglichkeiten, die sich in eins durchdringen," in: idem, Schöpferische Entwicklung, 105f. and 186.

25 Bergson, Schöpferische Entwicklung, 17.

> Vos kumt dos yor. Vos in tsveytn.
> Tsu vos yorn kumendike:
> Gornisht kumt nisht.
>
> What will happen this year? What the next?
> What for the coming years:
> nothing comes.[26]

If one regards the absence of a question mark at the end of the poem as intentional, the preceding questions must be read as assertions amplifying the ambivalence of Fogel's texts. The emotional state indicated in the title turns out to be the still wakeful mind whiling away on the edge of the abyss. The moment sketched in the first two verses begins to lose its contours on the waves of repetition, finally culminating in the autarchic grid of everyday life, which turns out to be "a single day that returns a thousand times."[27] Time is a valuable resource that cannot (or can no longer) be measured and ordered with numbers. Fogel here equates exhaustion with the loss of a sense of time and of the ability to grasp or comprehend time in the monotony of being-in-the-world. In the poem *Midkeyt*, different layers of time collide: one's limited life-time, the boundless world-time, and cyclical time, which alleviates the linearity of the first two temporal layers.

"When one day is like all the others, then they are all like one," is how Thomas Mann described the phenomenon of the moment that extends through emptiness and monotony, concluding that habituation is a "dulling of one's sense of time."[28] Dvoyre Fogel admired the author of *Der Zauberberg* (The Magic Mountain, 1924) among other things for this radiant analysis of "the costly 'time,'" as she put it in a letter to Markus Ehrenpreis dated 23 January 1938.[29] In 1930, the novel was published in Polish translation. It is unknown when and in which language Fogel read it. In any case, there are other documented instances in which she referred to Mann's prose in the second half of the 1930s, namely in a letter to Bruno Schulz dated 9 January 1939 and in her review of Rudolf Brunngraber's *Karl und das zwanzigste Jahrhundert* (Karl and the Twentieth Century).[30]

"Today again is / the fifteenth day of the month,"[31] is how Dvoyre Fogel opens the poem *Midkeyt*. The number fifteen is reminiscent of Jewish annual festivals that occur on full moons. The lyrical self may have fallen

26 Debora Vogel, Weariness, in: Blooming Spaces, 148.
27 Vogel, Weariness, 148.
28 Thomas Mann, Der Zauberberg. Roman, Frankfurt a. M. 2008, 146.
29 Debora Vogel's letter to Marcus Ehrenpreis from 23 January 1938, in: Blooming Spaces, 327f., here 327.
30 Vogel, Die Geometrie des Verzichts, 561 and 438–444.
31 Vogel, Weariness, 148.

out of linear time on account of its weariness, yet remains connected to its surroundings through the rhythm of natural cycles. The onset of spring recurs cyclically with the first blossoming of the apple trees while the ripe fruits of chestnut trees announce the beginning of a new autumn. Even the naming of seven "unused years"[32] refers to a temporal cycle. The number seven already served in antiquity to delineate time into easily comprehensible, recurring sequences of weeks. In the Bible as well as in fables and myths of all cultures, seven years symbolize the transition between drought and abundance (for example in the dream of Pharaoh) and function as epitomes of waiting or as arduous periods necessary to undergo interior transformation (for example Jacob's service in order to be allowed to marry Rachel).

With simple verses and monotonous rhythms, Fogel created a world full of tension. She preferred simple comparisons over sophisticated imagery and thereby distilled a powerful metaphorical plasticity from language. Following Cyprian Kamil Norwid's poetological reflections on quietude as the essence of all poetry, she described hackneyed, colorless, boring, and impersonal expressions as "white words" and declared them to be the constitutive element of her linguistic art: It was not through abstract accumulations of concepts, but through the concrete, yet often disregarded appearance of things and gestures in ostensibly circumstantial situations that "the factual expression of the formless mass of life" revealed itself.[33] Paralleling the fine arts, this was an attempt to express the novel fantastic of the unpretentious and the geometrical, thereby substantially eclipsing "the apparent colorfulness of flourishes and additions."[34]

In the final stanza of *Midkeyt*, Dvoyre Fogel readopted the image of days that she had monotonously enumerated in her two earlier poem cycles, *Rekhtekn* (Rectangles, 1924) and *Hayzer un gasn* (Houses and Streets, 1926). Here, she compressed this image to an inner impression of momentary everydayness emerging from "a single day that returns a thousand times," of which the structure dissolves subjectively in the grid.[35] This grid breaks down barriers and is therefore connected intimately with the avant-garde and the preference for simple forms. On the formal level, Fogel's texts remain closely connected to the grid. Linguistically, the texts from the

32 Vogel, Weariness, 148.
33 Debora Vogel, White Words in Poetry (1931), in: Blooming Spaces, 3–11, here 6.
34 Debora Vogel, The Dwelling in Its Psychic and Social Functions (1932), in: Blooming Spaces, 73–82, here 76.
35 Stasis finds its complete expression in a surface covered by a grid, as Rosalind E. Krauss wrote in her profound essay on the originality of the avant-garde. Idem, Die Originalität der Avantgarde und andere Mythen der Moderne, ed. and introd. by Herta Wolf, transl. from the Engl. by Jörg Heininger, Amsterdam/Dresden 2000, 205f. and 208.

cycle *Mide kleyder* and the volume *Tog-figurn* have an alienating effect as they force structures onto the reader that are not mere adaptations of reality, but rather reflect reality formally in accordance with its structures; the texts reveal themselves in slow and monotonously repetitive statements of fact.

The "unspent years" no longer count in *Midkeyt*, while the coming years will foreseeably amount to nothing. The poet here questions the meaning of years and thereby also the meaningfulness of (human) existence. While the question "What for?" already appeared in *Tog-figurn* and then in the following volume *Manekinen*, it is only raised this one time in the cycle *Mide kleyder*. It is no coincidence that this question appears immediately before the portrayal of the grid structure of reality as "a single day that returns a thousand times."[36] Through this image of the grid of days, Fogel approaches the absolute freedom from purposes of life (and art) suggested by Rosalind E. Krauss, which holds the promise of autonomy.[37] Thus, these opening verses of the cycle reflect the hardly tangible zero point of temporality, which is also where Bergson's principle of the purposiveness of creation based on uniformity, repetition, and patterns originates, the strict application of which leads to the conclusion: Everything is already given.[38]

Recurring Moments

The poem *Gezegenen* is located semantically and formally at the center of the cycle *Mide kleyder*. Immediately before and after this text, Fogel examines how the lyrical I and You pass each other by. The preceding *Libes-lid* (Love Poem) exposes the ordinariness of all events. On a gray afternoon "between two dull identical days,"[39] the belated appearance of the lyrical You only serves to raise the question: "Why does everything always come too late?"[40] In the following *A libe-lid* (A Love Poem), by contrast, the lyrical I is delayed by a quarter-hour and ponders about the daily farewells "forever," which are always followed by renewed meetings during which one "walk[s] side by side somewhere far away."[41] This metaphor of parallel togetherness morphs into a sensory depiction of the body drifting alone through the city, bearing a sense of bodily closeness to the beloved within and projecting this nostalgically onto the entire cityscape:

36 Vogel, Weariness, 148.
37 Krauss, Die Originalität der Avantgarde und andere Mythen der Moderne, 206.
38 Bergson, Schöpferische Entwicklung, 51.
39 Debora Vogel, Love Poem, in: Blooming Spaces, 154.
40 Vogel, Love Poem, 154.
41 Debora Vogel, A Love Poem, in: Blooming Spaces, 155.

און איך קרייז אַרום אַליין
אין די גלעזערנע גאַסן פֿון אַ נעכטלעכער שטאָט
און לאָז מיך צערטלען פֿון אַ געלער פּלאַקאַטן־וואַנט
און קוש מיט דעם גאַנצן לייַב דאָס קאַרמין־פֿלייש פֿון רויטע אותיות.

Un ikh krayz arum aleyn
in di glezerne gasn fun a nekhtlekher shtot
un loz mikh tsertlen fun a geler plakatn-vant
un kush mit dem gantsn layb dos karmin-fleysh fun royte oysyes.

But alone I walk in circles
in the glass streets of the night city
and allow a yellow wall with flyers to caress me
my whole body kissing the scarlet flesh of crimson letters.[42]

This image is existentially deepened by the subsequent text, *Midkeyt fun vartn* (Weariness of Waiting), in which all of life is depicted as milling around, as a yearning traversal of all streets, and as an eternally missed meeting of the lyrical I and You.

Gezegenen is the only point in the cycle *Mide kleyder* that the You and I appear as We. Their togetherness extends over five mutually experienced autumns. Carl Gustav Jung regarded the number five as the number of the natural human, while in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (Elective Affinities), Johann Wolfgang von Goethe equated this number with a symbol of free love in contrast to the "social family" based on the number four.[43] The We in Fogel's poem keeps dissolving in recurring moments of "yellow glow" and "gray stillness."[44] Now the days of Elul are nearing, the days of atonement and reflection—the month of Elul, in which Seliḥot are recited before Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, marks the approach of the turn of the year. In the Jewish annual cycle, this month signifies the conclusion of what has already passed and the anticipation of what is to come. In these days, the lyrical I and You once again feel their unconnected togetherness:

מיר וועלן וויידער אַמאָל גיין אַליין.
מיט גלייַכע גאַסן גיין
און זיך נישט טרעפֿן.

Mir veln vider amol geyn aleyn.
Mit glaykhe gasn geyn
un zikh nisht trefn.

42 Vogel, A Love Poem, 155.
43 Harald Haarmann, Weltgeschichte der Zahlen, Munich 2008, 21.
44 Debora Vogel, Farewell, in: Blooming Spaces, 154f., here 154.

> Once again we want
> to walk alone.
> To walk the same streets
> and never meet.[45]

In Fogel's poems, bodies traverse the boundaries of their world through their walking alone, which separates them spatially and temporally from one another, as well as their parallel walking together, widely apart. In this movement, which impairs the senses, the outside world is subjectively romanticized. These autarchic space-time schematics are repeatedly reminiscent of Jakob Johann von Uexküll's theory of the function circle, a concept according to which every organism experiences the world in its own unique way and conditions the world around itself according to its own experiences and impressions. The illusion of an objective perspective on things and phenomena is here abandoned along with generally applicable theorems, as all organisms are subjectivized as individuals enclosed in their own worlds.[46]

The lyrical We in *Gezegenen* is a mosaic of multiple separations and togethernesses in the cycle of (re-)remembering and (re-)recognizing. This mosaic appears to correspond to Søren Kierkegaard's view that memory and repetition constitute the true earnestness of human existence. If robbed of these characteristics, all of life dissolves into a noise devoid of content. All of life consequently consists of memory and repetition, synonymous with backward and forward motions.

Beyond One's Own Time

Can this anticipation, which so exhausts the lyrical self, be understood as Fogel's alternative to the Hegelian now without a before and after? Is it an exhausting intellectual and at the same time sensory attitude of self-delineation as a revelation of the meaning-giving power of renunciation? In *Mide kleyder*, the stream of practiced waiting flows incessantly onward, constituting the self in the primordial stream of life. Dvoyre Fogel regarded the wasteland of nature as the best form of expression for empty silence, for a life enshrouded in the sound of death, as a metaphor encompassing all of existence.[47] Especially in the cycle *Mide kleyder*, she varied

45 Vogel, Farewell, 154f.
46 Rüdiger Safranski, Zeit. Was sie mit uns macht und was wir aus ihr machen, Munich 2015, 136f. and 201.
47 Vogel, Die Geometrie des Verzichts, 549.

this form of expression in manifold ways and interwove it organically with interior emotional states. In the first part of the cycle, nature appears as synesthetically integrated into the self's interior world. Fogel endowed yellow cherries with the watery smell of longing and the stale taste of wandering through nocturnal streets (*Fun der benkshaft*; On Longing). In the following text, by contrast, she transforms the sun into a giant red cherry, with the lyrical self sucking at its "sticky flesh / of lost evenings and unused days"[48] (*Karshnroyte zun*; Cherry-Red Sun). The poet interprets the mountains (*Berg un frukhtn*; Mountain and Fruit) on the one hand as real plums on a "flat platter / of gray fog"[49] and on the other hand as a still life by Paul Cézanne, whose apples no longer represent nature as such, but rather the structures underlying nature, the essence, the entirety, which comes into its own through a slow rhythmic flow of lines. In *Geler peyzazh* (Yellow Landscape), the primordial landscape devoid of people first appears that Fogel went on to describe in great detail across three poems in the second part of the cycle:

> ערגעץ אין געלרויטן הייסן זאַמד
> פֿליסט פֿויל אַ לײַמיקער טײַך
> און שמעקט קלעביק מיט געלע מידע בלעטער.

> Ergets in gelroytn heysn zamd
> flist foyl a leymiker taykh
> un shmekt klebik mit gele mide bleter.
>
> Somewhere in hot yellow-red sand
> a loamy river idly flows
> with the sticky smell of tired yellow leaves.[50]

Funm barg-vint (Of Mountain Wind), *Dos lid funm taykh* (Poem about the River), and *Dos primitive lebn* (Primitive Life) are poetic images of nature, remote and devoid of people, in which the temporal backdrop expands from the flat sound of days to encompass a thousand years. The lyrical self finds momentary refuge from this streaming primordial vastness of life between its own four walls, draped with nacre-colored wallpaper (*Mayn shtub*; My Dwelling). However, this home loses its concrete contours and transforms into a cool shell, from which the self is sucked into the gray of the tired streets before being able to return to its room. The desire to be alone—"Without you. Without anyone"[51]—is only realized in the intervals between going away and coming back, until the self finally dissipates

48 Debora Vogel, Cherry-Red Sun, in: Blooming Spaces, 153.
49 Debora Vogel, Mountains and Fruit, in: Blooming Spaces, 153f., here 153.
50 Debora Vogel, Yellow Landscape, in: Blooming Spaces, 150f., here 150.
51 Debora Vogel, My Dwelling, in: Blooming Spaces, 161f., here 162.

completely in the monotonous landscape of the present in the final poem of the cycle, *A lid vegn oygn*.

One of the most radical movements of the avant-garde was grounded in homogeneity as the basis of perception, namely the Unism of Władysław Strzemiński.[52] Dvoyre Fogel was well acquainted with both his paintings and his theoretical writings, in which art was conceived of as a continuation of space and the strict focus on the primary qualities of a picture transformed form into content. In her most important essay, *O sztuce abstrakcyjnej* (On Abstract Art), Fogel called Unism "an answer to our urgent need for balance and boundaries in space."[53] In the same text, she discussed works by artists of the group Żywi (The Living) and of the Grupa Krakowska (Kraków Group),[54] describing these as "metaphorical landscapes" of tensions and directions capable of awakening an unbelievable atmosphere of stasis.

Fogel regarded the disassembly of things, their division into complexes of tension and direction, as the first stage of abstract art (Cubism, Constructivism, and Purism). In the second stage, these tensions and directions are transformed into actual contents of reality (Suprematism and Unism). She described the world of abstract art as "an unambiguous world without a mask, into the authentic world of the most important feelings in life"[55] and regarded it as the best kind of connection between emotion and intellect.

In *A lid vegn oygn*, the dissolution of boundaries of the *Eigenwelt* (own-world) takes place in the trickling out of the eyes. This had already been suggested in the third triptych poem about waiting, where it was nevertheless still tied to the self and the self's longing for the You:

> דאָס בלאָ פֿון מײַנע אויגנווײַסלעך
> פֿליסט אויס נאָך דיר.
> טראָפּט אויס פּאַמעלעך
> ווי אַ זיסער ווײַן פֿון זיבניעריקן בענקשאַפֿט־מאָסט.

> Dos blo fun mayne oygnvayslekh
> flist oys nokh dir.
> Tropt oys pamelekh
> vi a ziser vayn fun zibnyerikn benkshaft-most.

52 The Polish painter and art theorist Władysław Strzemiński (1893–1952) formulated his theory of Unism as an extreme variant of Constructivism in 1927.

53 Debora Vogel, On Abstract Art (1934), in: Blooming Spaces, 65–69, here 67.

54 The artist group Żywi was founded in 1931 by the painter Stanisław Ososotowicz (1906–1939) and served as the precursor of the Grupa Krakowska, which emerged in 1932 and was active until 1939. Dvoyre Fogel published in *Gazeta Artystów* and *Tygodnik Artystów* (Artists' Weekly), both of which were edited by the Kraków-based artists in 1934/35.

55 Vogel, On Abstract Art (1934), 65.

> The blue of my eyes
> flows out after you.
> Slowly trickles out
> like a sweet fruity wine of longing, aged for seven years.[56]

In *A lid vegn oygn*, the self disappears now that it has been decoupled from the sense of sight. In the first stanza, the eyes "glow like two hard chestnuts […] in the yellow tin frying pan of the streets."[57] They stand like "hard kernels of sadness," metaphorically still with tangible contours, for what is past, for what is no longer. In the second stanza, they have transformed into "still dates" and pull the You through silent nocturnal streets. Like heavy drops of waiting, they melt away in the ineffability of the vanishing moment. Both images are existentially loaded and allude to bread as the symbol of life. In the Canton of Ticino in the southern Suisse, in the nineteenth century, chestnuts belonged to the basic foodstuffs enabling the survival of the population through the winter months, which is why they were known as "the bread of the poor." By contrast, dates are "the bread of the desert." In Islam, the fast is broken with a date. In Christianity, dates stand for justice and honesty. In Judaism, the date palm is regarded as the tree of life.

At the end of Fogel's poem, the eyes lose their precise contours and transform into "velvet brown specks / and fall heavily, like sweet drops of renunciation, onto streets, lanterns, and bodies, / from which nothing can come anymore."[58] This is a tangibly mystic suspending moment of amalgamation with being: The perceptive eyes penetrate drop by drop into the moment, causing it to melt away, too.

This melting away of the eyes into and with the landscape allows on the one hand for the transcendence of the Suprematist experience to be rediscovered, while on the other hand Fogel here reveals the perspective of the poet as that of the painter, who thinks in images and, like Cézanne and subsequently Henri Matisse and Piet Mondrian, creatively decodes nature and thereby co-creates it.[59] Fogel grappled with the nullity of existence in the mounted sequences of her texts, which she regarded as a "course of life" and which she tried to connect through an amplified sense of time.

56 Vogel, 3 Poems on Waiting, 157.

57 Debora Vogel, A Poem About Eyes, in: Blooming Spaces, 162.

58 Vogel, A Poem About Eyes, 162.

59 Matisse expanded on the sight explored by Cézanne with Bergson's notion of intuition, while Mondrian accentuated solidarity. See Gottfried Boehm, Paul Cézanne und die Moderne, in: Cézanne und die Moderne. Picasso, Braque, Léger, Mondrian, Klee, Matisse, Giacometti, Rothko, DeKooning, Kelly (exhibition catalogue), Ostfildern-Ruit 1999, 10–28, here 21; Adolf Behne, Neues Wohnen—neues Bauen, Leipzig 1930, 106 f.

In her view, time served as the actual binding material of her texts, with life serving as the main protagonist.[60] Dvoyre Fogel regarded both her poetry and her prose as montages, in which she confidently employed modern stylistic techniques that demystify sight in a technical era: Microscopically, she penetrated into every detail in order to regard things and phenomena from a very close perspective.[61] This enabled her to dismantle distance and to portray things free from their usual contexts, prefabricated interpretations, and clichéd labels—an approach that allowed *Neues Sehen* (New Vision) to be applied in literature, too.

Fogel processed the polarized impenetrability of life, and its incessant interaction between content and form, by liberating things close and distant at once from their habitual contexts. The worldview she constructed can only be perceived through expanded and synesthetically entangled senses. This is alluded to by the tentative trickling eyes in *A lid vegn oygn*; this is sight functioning as the touch of the retina in Bergson's sense, a sight in which the irrational is combined with the rational in a form that is constantly renewed and can never be purely separated. This is the Bergsonian unity of instinct and intellect, in which the former is a hardly governable realization of contents in the distance while the latter is an inborn realization of form that creates order.[62] The complete picture can only be grasped for a moment, during its disintegration, when its details coexist alongside each other. In the poem *A lid vegn oygn*, the lyrical subject blurs between You and I, reminiscent of how it reaches beyond itself in the now and of the floating between the before and after, which Georg Simmel regarded as the creation of the present into a boundless continuity.[63]

Dvoyre Fogel's poetry emerged from a life fragmented in her textual processes in order to guide her readers back to a life equated with existential conditions (renunciation, waiting, longing) and with the loneliness of the You and I. Fogel examined the banal and the obvious and deconstructed organic connotations in order to arrive at the innermost layer of things. As she herself testified in numerous theoretical texts, she learned this approach from modern art.

Translated from the German by Tim Corbett

60 Debora Vogel, Montage as a Literary Genre (1937), in: Blooming Spaces, 29–34, here 30.
61 Debora Vogel, Literary Montage. An Introduction (1938), in: Blooming Spaces, 35–38, here 35.
62 Bergson, Schöpferische Entwicklung, 18, 153, and 172 f.
63 Georg Simmel, Lebensanschauung. Vier metaphysische Kapitel, Munich 1918, here 12 and 16 f.

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Anna Maja Misiak, born in 1974 in Łódź (Poland), studied history of art and German literature, completing a PhD in the latter with a dissertation on the biblical figure of Judith in 2003. She received grants in Paris (Fonds d'Aide aux Lettres Polonaises Indépendantes, 1999) and Vienna (Österreichischer Austauschdienst, 1999–2000). In 2016, she translated and edited the first German compilation of Dvoyre Fogel's works. Living in Bern (Switzerland) since 2003, her research interests are interrelations of text and image. *Selected Publications*: Debora Vogel, Die Geometrie des Verzichts. Gedichte, Montagen, Essays, Briefe, Wuppertal 2016; Judit. Gestalt ohne Grenzen, Bielefeld 2010; Judyta. Postać bez granic, Gdańsk 2005.

Moyshe Kulbak

FRIEDER VON AMMON

The Poetics of Birdsong: Moyshe Kulbak

Moyshe Kulbak was born in 1896 in Smorgon', a town located between Vilna and Minsk, then part of the Russian Empire and privately owned by the Radziwiłł family.[1] At that time, almost 7,000 Jews lived in the town, constituting three-fourths of its population. Besides Kulbak, Smorgon' would see the birth, in 1913, of another famous Yiddish writer, the great poet Avrom Sutzkever. Starting out in Hebrew, Kulbak switched to Yiddish soon. His first Yiddish poem to be published, *Shterndl* (Little Star), turned out to be one of his most popular.

During and after World War I, Kulbak spent some time in Minsk and Vilna, where he became a teacher of Hebrew and later Yiddish literature. It was here, in Vilna, where he published his first volume of poetry under the title *Shirim* (Poems). These works seem to have been very popular in the city, especially among the younger generation. At the time, Kulbak still was a devoted communist and ardent follower of the Russian Revolution. In 1920, Kulbak moved to Berlin, then host to one of the most vibrant literary scenes in Europe, attracting Jewish writers and others, which makes Kulbak's Berlin years highly interesting. He shared a space with some of the Weimar Republic's most important modernists, many of them of Jewish descent. Whom did he meet in those years, whom did he speak to? Unfortunately, we are not aware of the details. He could have encountered anyone from Walter Mehring, the great German Jewish satirist, who wrote bilingual, German and Yiddish poems (and was one of the first to do so), to Kurt Tucholsky, who had already started his career as one of the Weimar Republic's most brilliant writers and publicists, to Else Lasker-Schüler, a leading figure of German Expressionism, or the Galicia-born poet Mascha Kaléko, a representative of the Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity), who had moved to Berlin two years before Kulbak. He might even have met Franz Kafka, who, in the early 1920s, also spent some time in Berlin. It would be a highly demanding yet rewarding task

1 For Kulbak's life and works, see Avraham Novershtern, Art. "Kulbak, Moyshe," transl. from the Yidd. by Marc Caplan, in: The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, ed. by Gershon David Hundert, 2010, <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Kulbak_Moyshe> (14 July 2022).

In Their Surroundings, 127–132 | doi.org/10.13109/9783666306112.127

Fig. 1: The Romanisches Café in Berlin, 1936.

to disentangle the possibilities of all these Jewish creatives from across Eastern Europe gathering in Berlin's coffeehouses, above all the famous Romanisches Café (Romanesque Café), also (based on the Yiddish word *rakhmones* = pity) nicknamed *Rachmonisches Café* (Coffeehouse of Pity) by its Jewish guests, as even the penniless were allowed to linger there for hours (fig. 1). A starting point for such an undertaking could be Kulbak's poem *In shenk* (In the Tavern), in which he ironically portrays the guests of the coffeehouse.

What we know for certain is that Kulbak took classes at Humboldt University, that he studied the works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich Schiller, William Wordsworth, George Gordon Byron, Heinrich Heine, and Friedrich Nietzsche, and that he wrote texts which were influenced by those classics as well as by German Expressionism. His second volume of poetry—*Lider* (Songs)—was published in 1922 by the Jewish publishing house Klal-Farlag in Berlin (fig. 2). Kulbak's first novel, *Meshiekh ben Efroim* (The Messiah of the House of Efraim), was published two years later, also in Berlin. And one of his masterpieces of the 1930s—*Disner tshayld harold* (Childe Harold of Disna), a satire on Germany—draws on Kulbak's Berlin years.

In 1923, Kulbak returned to Vilna, where he worked as a teacher. During that time, his fame as a poet rose, leading scholar Susanne Klingenstein

to declare him the "most popular Yiddish poet of Eastern Europe" (fig. 3).[2] His most famous poem, *Vilne* (Vilna), is a portrait of the city as he saw it. But Kulbak also continued to write prose: *Montog. A kleyner roman* (Monday. A Small Novel), his second novel, appeared in 1926. Two years later, he and his family (he had gotten married in 1924, a son had been born in 1926, a daughter followed in 1934) moved to Minsk, where he wrote his seminal novel *Zelmenyaner* (The Zelmenyaners). It was this novel, though, that caused fiery attacks by literary critics, because it did not fulfil the ideological standards of Soviet literature. In the years that followed, Kulbak came under the surveillance of the secret police, who arrested and sentenced him to death in 1937 on charges of anti-Soviet espionage. Kulbak was deported to a prison camp in Siberia and executed on 29 October.

Fig. 2: Cover of Moyshe Kulbak's *Lider*, published in 1922 in the series Klal-Bibl-yotek in Berlin.

Munye der foygl-hendler un Malkele zayn vayb (Muni the Bird Seller and Malkele His Wife) was first published in 1928. It is a brilliant piece of writing worth serious study, for, among other things, it shows quite well how the traditional Jewish world could be rendered in a modernist way—a project Kulbak pursued throughout his career.[3]

The story is divided into six paragraphs, each of them concentrating on Muni's interaction with one or two other protagonists: Muni and his father ("a man with a thick tangled beard"[4]), Muni and his birds, Muni and Neche, the market woman and matchmaker, Muni and Malke, his fiancée, Muni and Malke, his wife, and, finally, Muni, Malke, and Ziske Hannah Dobke's, the thief and adulterer ("wearing a pair of shiny high-boots"[5]). All characters, with the exception of Muni, are hardly more than stereotypes, making the plot somewhat foreseeable—Malke falls in love with Ziske, then cheats on Muni—but characters and plot are not the main focus of the story anyway. More crucial is the artistic lyrical style Kulbak uses, especially the way he pointedly employs surprising Expressionist metaphors. A fine example of this is "the red-veined autumn, who splashed and clanged about with his copper feet over all the roads"[6]; another one

2 Susanne Klingenstein, Moische Kulbak. Leben, Werk und Tod. 1896–1937, in: Moische Kulbak, Die Selmenianer. Roman, transl. from the Yidd. by Niki Graça and Esther Alexander-Ihme, with an epilogue on the life and work of Moishe Kulbak enriched by Susanne Klingenstein, Berlin 2017, 338–384, here 352 (translation by the author).

3 The story has been translated into English several times. This article is based on Moishe Kulbak, Muni the Bird-Seller, in: An Anthology of Modern Yiddish Literature, compiled and ed. by Joseph Leftwich, The Hague / Paris 1974, 85–92.

4 Kulbak, Muni the Bird-Seller, 85.

5 Kulbak, Muni the Bird-Seller, 91.

6 Kulbak, Muni the Bird-Seller, 91.

Fig. 3: Moyshe Kulbak in Vilna, 1923.

is Muni's necktie, which "glowed with seven fires."[7] This way, an alienating light is shed on the events depicted in the story. The realistic surface becomes translucent and seems to point to a hidden but never revealed meaning. In this respect, it evokes the stories of Kafka, without wanting to suggest a direct link between the authors; rather, the poetics of the two writers converge in this story. At the same time, the style differs noticeably: Much more intensely than Kafka, for example, Kulbak employs stylistic devices typically used in poetry, namely repetitions in various forms. Once, in the course of a description of a season, the sentence "It was autumn" is repeated no less than three times without any alteration, just as the refrain in a song.[8] Therefore, the text gains a musical quality which perfectly matches the chirping, cooing, singing, and whistling of the birds in Muni's house to be heard throughout the story, its soundtrack, so to speak. The text joins in the chirping, as it were.

Yet another significant aspect of the story related to this bizarre bird music is its conspicuous bird symbolism, ranging from allusions to the biblical dove to Mozart's funny bird catcher Papageno, compared to whom Muni, the disabled bird seller, is a character all the more pitiable, for indeed songs are sung about him "in the marshlands and in all the remote forests

7 Kulbak, Muni the Bird-Seller, 88.
8 Kulbak, Muni the Bird-Seller, 90.

of White Russia"[9] (while Papageno, according to his famous aria, is "well known to old and young throughout the land"). But Muni himself cannot sing, although he tries, and, in the end, he does not find his Papagena; instead, his heart is broken. There are even more allusions: The old raven, which a peasant "old as the world"[10] brings to Muni's house one day, where it remains to sit on the stove, obviously refers to Edgar Allan Poe's poem *The Raven*. In both texts, the raven stands for death, loss, and memory, but also for poetry. Most important, however, is the fact, that Muni himself is a bird-like character. At the end of the story, he seems to have turned into a bird completely, a rather sad bird, which cowers on the floor of its cage and can neither fly nor sing. Therefore, it is perhaps not too farfetched to interpret Muni as the tragic embodiment of a *luftmentsh* in the sense this metaphor was used by Eastern European Jews before it was instrumentalized by antisemites and then, in the course of the Shoah, became a reality beyond all imagination.[11]

Literature

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Susanne Klingenstein, Moische Kulbak. Leben, Werk und Tod 1896–1937, in: Moische Kulbak, Die Selmenianer. Roman, transl. from the Yidd. by Niki Graça and Esther Alexander-Ihme, with an epilogue on the life and work of Moishe Kulbak enriched by Susanne Klingenstein, Berlin 2017, 338–384.

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9 Kulbak, Muni the Bird-Seller, 86.
10 Kulbak, Muni the Bird-Seller, 87.
11 For the history of this metaphor, see Nicolas Berg, Luftmenschen. Zur Geschichte einer Metapher, with a foreword by Dan Diner, Göttingen 2008.

Author

Frieder von Ammon is professor of German literature at the LMU Munich since 2022. He studied German and comparative literature as well as musicology at the LMU and at Reed College in Portland, Oregon. He received his PhD from the LMU in 2004. There, he taught German literature at the Department of German Studies from 2000 to 2015. In 2015, he was appointed professor of German literature at Leipzig University. In 2020, he became chief editor of a historical-critical edition of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's letters. His current research focuses on the theory and history of poetry, the relation of literature and music, and German literature from about 1750 to the present. *Selected Publications*: Thomas Kling, Werke in vier Bänden, Berlin 2020 (ed. with Marcel Beyer, Gabriele Wix, and Peer Trilcke); Lyrik/Lyrics. Songtexte als Gegenstand der Literaturwissenschaft, Göttingen 2019 (ed. with Dirk von Petersdorff); Fülle des Lauts. Aufführung und Musik in der deutschsprachigen Lyrik seit 1945. Das Werk Ernst Jandls in seinen Kontexten, Stuttgart 2018; Ungastliche Gaben. Die "Xenien" Goethes und Schillers und ihre literarische Rezeption von 1796 bis in die Gegenwart, Tübingen 2005.

EFRAT GAL-ED

A Delicious Cooing and Chirping: Reading the First Chapter of Moyshe Kulbak's *Munye der foygl-hendler un Malkele zayn vayb* (Munye the Bird Seller and Malkele His Wife, 1928)

The only short story written by Moyshe Kulbak—*Munye der foygl-hendler un Malkele zayn vayb* (Munye the Bird Seller and Malkele His Wife)[1]—was first published in September 1928, in the Vilna monthly *Di Yidishe Velt* (The Yiddish World).[2] The fall of that year marked a decisive turn in Kulbak's life. In October, a month after the publication, he moved to the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic and settled in Minsk. This short story would therefore be the last prose he wrote in a situation that allowed him complete artistic autonomy (fig. 1).

In the sequence of his works, it follows *Montog. A kleyner roman* (Monday. A Small Novel), published in Vilna in 1926, and precedes the novel *Zelmenyaner* (The Zelmenyaners), a family saga published in installments in the Minsk monthly *Der Shtern* (The Star): part one in 1929 and 1930, part two from 1933 to 1935. Among scholars, the latter work is considered "one of the most significant achievements in Soviet Yiddish prose."[3] In both novels, and in the short story as well, Kulbak creates anti-heroes who represent Jewish life through an unusual textual practice that allows the

1 The author offers her heartfelt thanks to Annelen Kranefuss, Hans Lösener, Ajahn Sucitto, Daria Vakhrushova, and Akiñcano M. Weber for stimulating comment on this article.

2 Moyshe Kulbak, Munye der foygl-hendler un Malkele zayn vayb [Munye the Bird Seller and Malkele His Wife], in: Di Yidishe Velt [The Yiddish World], no. 6, September 1928, 333–346.

3 Avraham Novershtern, Art. "Kulbak, Moyshe," in: The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, ed. by Gershon David Hundert, 2010, transl. from the Yidd. by Marc Caplan, <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Kulbak_Moyshe> (14 June 2022). On Kulbak's life and work, see also Robert Adler Peckerar/Aaron Rubinstein, Moyshe Kulbak (1896–1937), in: Joseph Sherman (ed.), Writers in Yiddish. Dictionary of Literary Biography, vol. 333, Detroit, Mich., 2007, 121–129.

Fig. 1: Moyshe Kulbak (second row, third from left) with students of the Jewish Gymnasium in Vilna, next to him the writer H. Leyvik (fourth from left), 1920s.

narrator to alternate between sympathetic perspectives and distancing ones. But the three works are quite distinct in terms of the worlds they present, the narrator's attitude, and the narrative strategies employed.

The Text

At the center of the story is Munye, whose name is both in the title and also stands as the opening word of the text. He is a young village Jew with no legs,[4] living with his birds in a shabby hut at the edge of a Belarusian forest. In a rapid, vividly depicted sequence of events, Kulbak designs a nuanced

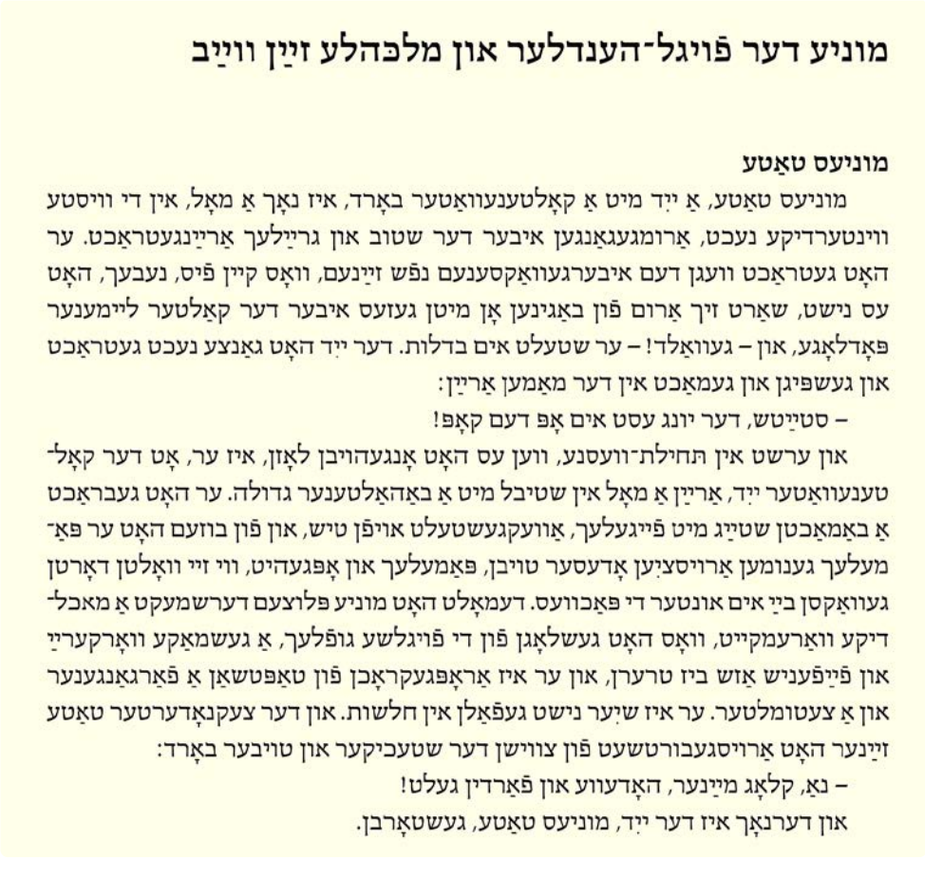
4 In comparison with other protagonists, e.g., Shmuel Itse in the long poem *Lamedvov* (1922) and the *lyulkeman* (pipeman) in the long poem *Disner tshayld harold* (1933), legless Munye cannot set off into the world and wander around it. See also Jordan Finkin, "Like Fires in Overgrown Forests." Moyshe Kulbak's Contemporary Berlin Poetics, in: Gennady Estraikh / Mikhail Krutikov (eds.), Yiddish in Weimar Berlin. At the Crossroads of Diaspora Politics and Culture, London 2010, 73–88, here 75 f.

panorama of the inner life of this disabled man. Through his strongly rhythmic and image-saturated language, Kulbak creates a poetic prose where atmosphere and inner dynamics alternate, and Munye's unspoken experiential world is expressed. The use of lyrical means of organization in Kulbak's poetic textual practice heightens the ambiguity of the text and enriches its aesthetic effect.

While maintaining the unity of place and action, the narrator focuses on decisive moments in Munye's life. In accord with the open form of the short story, the plot develops as a succession of selective events. The story, divided into six short chapters, constitutes an Expressionist account of Munye's family life: He grows up as a disabled person alone in the house of his father, who sees him as an economic burden. His father procures birds for him and exhorts him to make money with them. After his father's death, Munye becomes a bird seller. A market woman, who also works as a matchmaker, encourages him to marry. A bride, Malkele, is soon presented to him; she promises, "*du vest vern bay mir a mentsh,*" ("with me you'll settle down and be respectable"), and moves in; but she is soon bored with her life with Munye, and is unfaithful to him. After a while, she asks Munye to leave the bed they share and brings Ziske, her lover, into the house. Munye first drags himself to the wooden bench of his childhood and youth. But after he hears Malkele and her lover in the bedroom, he seeks refuge in the dovecote, sitting there like a stone on the floor among his animals.

The story is nine pages long in Yiddish, eight in the English translation. A close reading of the whole would be beyond the scope of this article; I shall therefore consider only certain aspects of Kulbak's artistic textual practices in the story, and give special attention to the first chapter (fig. 2).[5] Its title is *Munyes tate* (Munye's Father), and it provides a rhythmically written, lapidary exposition of the situation. It leads readers into Munye's world, portrays his father, indicates the story's fundamental mood, and

5 The English translation by Norbert Guterman in *A Treasury of Yiddish Stories* is based on the first reprint of the story in the *Antologye fun der yidisher proze in Poyln tsvishn beyde velt-milkhomes (1914–1939)*, compiled by Yekhiel Yeshaye Trunk and Arn Tseytlin. In this publication, the first chapter is missing. The full version of the story was reprinted in the anthology *A shpigl oyf a shteyn*, compiled by Benjamin Harshav, Chone Shmeruk, and Avrom Sutzkever. The later English translation by Joseph Leftwich renders the complete story, but omits the division into chapters and the chapters' titles. Y. Y. Trunk / A. Tseytlin (eds.), Antologye fun der yidisher proze in Poyln tsvishn beyde velt-milkhomes (1914–1939) [Anthology of Yiddish Prose in Poland between the Two World Wars (1914–1939)], New York 1946; Irwing Howe and Eliezer Greenberg (eds.), A Treasury of Yiddish Stories, New York 1955, 342–350; Benjamin Harshav / Chone Shmeruk / Avrom Sutskever (eds.), A shpigl oyf a shteyn. Antologye. Poezye un proze fun tsvelf farshnitene yidishe shraybers in Ratn-Farband [A Mirror on a Stone. Anthology. Poetry and Prose by Twelve Murdered Yiddish Writers in the Soviet Union], Tel Aviv 1964; Joseph Leftwich, An Anthology of Modern Yiddish Literature, The Hague / Paris 1974.



מוניע דער פֿויגל־הענדלער און מלכּהלע זיין ווייב

מוניעס טאַטע

מוניעס טאַטע, אַ ייִד מיט אַ קאָלטענעוואַטער באָרד, איז נאָך אַ מאָל, אין די ווינטערדיקע נעכט, אַרומגעגאַנגען איבער דער שטוב און גרייַלעך אַרײַנגעטראַכט. ער האָט געטראַכט וועגן דעם איבערגעוואַקסענעם נפֿש זײַנעם, וואָס קיין פֿיס, נעבעך, האָט עס נישט, שאַרט זיך אַרום פֿון באַגינען אָן מיטן געזעס איבער דער קאַלטער לײַמענער פּאָדלאָגע, און – געוואַלד! – ער שטעלט אים בדלות. דער ייִד האָט גאַנצע נעכט געטראַכט און געשפּיגן און געמאַכט אין דער מאַמען אַרײַן:

– סטײַטש, דער יונג עסט אים אָפּ דעם קאָפּ!

און ערשט אין תּחילת־וועסנע, וועו עס האָט אָנגעהויבן לאָזן, איז ער, אָט דער קאָל־טענעוואַטער ייִד, אַרײַן אַ מאָל אין שטיבל מיט אַ באַהאַלטענער גדולה. ער האָט געבראַכט אַ באַמאַכטן שטײַג מיט פֿייגעלעך, אַוועקגעשטעלט אויפֿן טיש, און פֿון בוזעם האָט ער פּאַ־מעלעך גענומען אַרויסצײַען אָדעסער טויבן, פּאַמעלעך און אָפּגעהיט, ווי זיי וואָלטן דאָרטן געוואַקסן בײַ אים אונטער די פּאַכוועס. דעמאָלט האָט מוניע פֿלוצעם דערשמעקט אַ מאכל־דיקע וואַרעמקייט, וואָס האָט געשלאָגן פֿון די פֿויגלשע גופֿלעך, אַ געשמאַקע וואַרקערײַ און פֿײַפֿעניש אַזש ביז טערערן, און ער איז אַראָפּגעקראָכן פֿון טאַפּטשאַן אַ פֿאַרגאַנגענער און אַ צעטומלטער. ער איז שיער נישט געפֿאַלן אין חלשות. און דער צעקנאָדערטער טאַטע זײַנער האָט אַרויסגעבורטשעט פֿון צווישן דער שטעכיקער און טויבער באָרד:

– נאַ, קלאָג מײַנער, האָדעווע און פֿאַרדין געלט!

און דערנאָך איז דער ייִד, מוניעס טאַטע, געשטאָרבן.

Fig. 2: First chapter of Moyshe Kulbak's *Munye der foygl-hendler un Malkele zayn vayb*, first published in September 1928 in *Di Yidishe Velt*.

communicates the key past experiences that determine Munye's present situation:

> "Munyes tate, a yid mit a koltenevater bord, iz nokh a mol, in di viste vinterdike nekht, arumgegangen iber der shtub un graylekh araynge-trakht. [1] Er hot getrakht vegn dem ibergevaksenem nefesh zay-nem, vos keyn fis, nebekh, hot es nisht, shart zikh arum fun baginen on mitn gezes iber der kalter leymener podloge, un—gevald!—er shtelt im bedales. [2] Der yid hot gantse nekht getrakht un geshpign un gemakht in der mamen arayn: [3]
> —Staytsh, der yung est im op dem kop! [4]
> Un ersht in tkhiles-vesne, ven es hot ongehoybn lozn, iz er, ot der koltenevater yid, arayn a mol in shtibl mit a bahaltener gdule. [5] Er hot gebrakht a bamakhtn shtayg mit feygelekh, avekgeshtelt afn tish, un fun buzem hot er pamelekh genumen aroystsien Odeser toybn, pamelekh un opgehit, vi zey voltn dortn gevaksn bay im unter di pakhves. [6] Demolt hot Munye plutsem dershmekt a maykhldike varemkayt, vos hot geshlogn fun di foyglshe guflekh, a geshmake vorkeray un fayfenish azh biz trern, un er iz aropgekrokhn fun taptshan a fargangener un a tsetumlter. [7] Er iz shir nisht gefaln in khaloshes. [8] Un der tseknoderter tate zayner hot aroysgeburtshet fun tsvishn der shtekhiker un toyber bord: [9]
> —Na, klog mayner, hodeve un fardin gelt! [10]
> Un dernokh iz der yid, Munyes tate, geshtorbn." [11]

> "Munye's father, a man with a shaggy beard, was again, in the gloomy winter nights, walking around the house and pondering deeply. [1] He was thinking about his overgrown offspring, who had no legs, the poor thing, and from daybreak on would crawl around on his buttocks on the cold clay floor, and—help!—is driving him to ruin. [2] Night after night, the man was thinking, spitting, and cursing like hell: [3]
> —The fact is, the lad is eating him out of house and home! [4]
> And only at the beginning of the spring, when the frost began to break, did he, this very shaggy man, enter the room one day with a hidden joy. [5] He brought in a filthy cage with birds in it, put it on the table, and began to pull Odessa pigeons slowly out of his breast pocket, slowly and carefully, as if they had grown under his armpits. [6] And then Munye suddenly felt a savory warmth streaming from the birds' little bodies, a delicious cooing and chirping that moved him to tears, and he crawled down from his bench, overwhelmed and confused. [7] He almost fainted. [8] And his unkempt father muttered through his prickly and unfeeling beard: [9]
> —Here you are, scourge of mine, breed them and earn money! [10]
> And then, the man, Munye's father, died." [11][6]

The short chapter consists of two paragraphs that end with a colon, and three separate, individual lines. The first paragraph is followed by an utterance in the form of free indirect discourse, which expresses the father's exasperation regarding his son and the financial burden his son lays upon him. The second, longer paragraph is followed by an utterance in direct speech, the only one in the chapter, in which the father tells his

6 The author thanks Daria Vakhrushova for her many contributions to the English translation of the passage.

son how to make money. The last of the individual lines reports the death of Munye's father.

The brief, lively prologue lets the reader know how Munye became a bird seller: His father, long complaining about his disabled son *"shtelt im bedales"* [2], one day brought home a cage with young birds, and ordered his son to raise and sell them, and thereby to earn a living.

Already in the first sentence, Munye's father is characterized by his shaggy, disheveled, matted beard: *"a yid mit a koltenevater bord"* [1]. The five-syllable, unshapely adjective is repeated in the second paragraph, as an epithet of the father, *"der koltenevater yid"* [5], by which man and beard are equated, and an image is evoked of someone unkempt and seedy. Munye's father is also portrayed as insensitive and hard-hearted, someone who, rather than feeling sympathy for his child, is outraged at the economic burden Munye imposes on him. *"Staytsh, der yung est im op dem kop!"* [4] His rough ways are emphasized gesturally, by his spitting and cursing. The Yiddish idiom used here to indicate cursing refers to the mother: *"gemakht in der mamen arayn"* [3].[7] It is the only place in the passage where the word "mother" occurs. This single mention makes the mother's absence from Munye's life—an absence whose causes remain unnamed—all the more conspicuous. Did the father's anger make the mother's life unbearable? Did she die young?

The reader learns in the same first paragraph about Munye's disability, *"vos keyn fis, nebekh, hot es nisht"* [2], but not what caused it. His being described as *"ibergevaksn"* [2] indicates that he is no longer a child, and would then in theory have to take care of his own needs. Instead, though, he slides all day on his rear end along the cold floor. These movements, here and later in the text, are repeatedly described by the verb *"arumsharn"* [2]; as a result, Munye's mode of moving (of creeping) is portrayed as a sort of pointless lurking. Later in the text, we hear also of *"krikhn,"* creeping or crawling, suggesting that Munye is almost reptilian.

The three sentences of the first paragraph are devoted to the father's exasperation, and to his thoughts about his problematic son during the long winter nights. The focus of the second paragraph, comprising nine sentences, is on the action resulting from these musings in the following

7 The phrase *"in der mamen arayn,"* here rendered with *"cursing like hell,"* is an allusion to a vulgar Russian curse. See also Yudel Mark, Great Dictionary of the Yiddish Language, 4 vols., here vol. 3, New York 1971, col. 1284. To express such violent cursing, Yiddish sometimes links the anger expressed in the cursing to a particular person—"into the father," "into the father's father," or as in our case "into the mother." See James A. Matisoff, Blessings, Curses, Hopes, and Fears. Psycho-Ostensive Expressions in Yiddish, Philadelphia, Pa., 1979, 63f.

spring, and the effect of this action on Munye. This paragraph also contains the explanation of the "misfortune"—*"klog mayner"* [10]—that has so burdened the father.

When the cold weather relented, and the ice began to thaw—*"ven es hot ongehoybn lozn"* [5]—the father brought some birds home, with which his son might start a business. That he brought them home *"mit a bahaltener gdule"* [5] indicates his joy at the solution he has found, and at the burden now fallen from him. It also indicates his pride at having found something for his son whereby Munye might earn a living independently, and through which his paternal task would now be completed. Moreover, dealing in birds would lead to Munye's social advancement.

The father's coarseness emphasized in the first paragraph is in sharp contrast to his attentiveness to the birds in the second. It is with great care that he takes the Odessa dove chicks from the inner pocket of his coat: *"un fun buzem hot er pamelekh genumen aroystsien Odeser toybn, pamelekh un opgehit"* [6]. The repetition of "slowly" underlines the gentleness of his behavior. The explanatory subordinate clause—*"vi zey voltn dortn gevaksn bay im unter di pakhves"* [6]—portrays the father in tender connection with creatures that have grown in the presence of his warmth, and from which he can only allow a gradual separation. The attentiveness and warmth manifested in his relation to the small birds are, however, absent from his relation to his son. The human coldness that will remain a constant in Munye's life is thus established even in the opening chapter.

This first physical warmth is portrayed as an emotional revelation, which the otherwise ill-tempered father provides for his son through the birds. The passage indicates that Munye will experience such warmth only in his relation to the birds. By means of a condensing of psychological phenomena characteristic of the short story, suggestive language compensates for what is left out—that is, Munye's emotional shock and his being overwhelmed—and is structured in synaesthetic juxtapositions: *"demolt hot Munye plutsem dershmekt a maykhldike varemkayt"* [7]. The warmth pulsing[8] from the small bodies is felt by Munye as smell and taste. Even their enchanting twittering he experiences as a taste—*"geshmake vorkeray un fayfenish"* [7].[9] He is touched to the point of tears and overwhelmed. The adjective *"fargangener"* [7], formed from the root of the word for walking, is, when applied to someone without legs, an especially expressive word to describe Munye's overwhelmed state; an impression amplified by the short

8 The repetition of the "g" sound four times and the "f" and "l" three times onomatopoetically emphasizes this pulsation: *"geshlogn fun di foyglshe guflekh."*

9 In the third chapter, *Munye and Malkele*, he dreams of the happiness of his impending marriage in images of warm, savory things to eat.

sentence: *"er iz shir nisht gefaln in khaloshes"* [8]. The Expressionist mode of metaphor modeled here is at work in the following chapters as well, enriching the concise, compressed narrative technique with its dimensions of mood and psychological experience.[10]

The father reacts to Munye's intense agitation with a directive growled into his beard. The adjective *"tseknoderter"* [8] not only reinforces, as a synonym, the already established image of the father as seedy, but also, and now in the sense of "crumpled," refers to his lined, old man's face. This points to the reason for which he feels compelled to make his son economically independent. The beard, a synecdoche in the first paragraph, is now characterized by two adjectives: *"shtekhiker un toyber"* [9]. A "prickly beard" is a conventional image, but a "deaf beard" creates a metaphor linking two images whose real referents do not belong together. Does the "deafness" of the beard correspond to the father's lack of sympathy? By choosing this homonym *"toyb"* (which means both "deaf" and "dove"), the author hints at another path to follow: In the reference to the small doves, with their soft feathers, the father's inconsistent behavior seems, when represented in the image of his beard, both hurtful *and* soft. The character trait conveyed by the similarity of sound calls into question the impression of the father's hard-heartedness that arises from the first paragraph. Does the father's exasperation come perhaps not from deficient sympathy but from his concern for a son who must soon care for himself, but cannot? Is the father's anger perhaps directed chiefly at himself, in his despair regarding the task of assuring, before his own death, that Munye will be able to manage on his own?

Growling into his beard, the father calls Munye *"klog mayner"* [10]. The epithet continues the ambivalence seen in the image of the beard. The possessive pronoun, coming after the noun, gives the designation "scourge" a softer tone. The scourge is not only lamented, but also addressed as the object of care, solicitude, and affection. The tender tone makes it plausible

10 The elements of Kulbak's metaphors are drawn from diverse spheres of life, and their boldness is increased still more through personification and exaggeration, e. g. the sunset without sun as the bride enters Munye's house: "Just where the sun should have set was an empty disconsolateness." The heavens without any sources of light are notated as "hollow passages of threadbare clouds," these in their turn compared with "scaffoldings," for "a building that was never built." This last image conjures up the next: Also like a scaffolding hang the two windows in Munye's house, "like a pair of glasses that see nothing." The emphatically negating image sequence renders Munye's inability to perceive and indicates that Malkele will not become a companion for him, and that the desired togetherness will not materialize. This anticipation of what will happen is intensified in the following chapter in a storm metaphor: "The wind pushed into the bellied roof, tore a wet rag from a window and beat with long, watery hands against the walls."

that the son, with all the misfortune of his disability, is no longer a signifier of misfortune. The possessive pronoun "mine" echoes *"nefesh zaynem"* [2] and *"tate zayner"* [9]. In the whole of the first chapter, possessive pronouns are used just these three times, a fact revealing not only the kinship of father and son but also their emotional connection.

The lapidary concluding sentence, *"un dernokh iz der yid, Munyes tate, geshtorbn"* [11], lets us feel the father's relief at being able to depart from life with his duty done. The inversion of the first clause of the chapter—*"Munyes tate, a yid"* [1]—into *"der yid, Munyes tate"* [11] in the final line mirrors the change only made possible by a death in good conscience. Munye's independent life begins with the father's death, and that life is now the story's subject.

The Rhythm of the Narrative

Moyshe Kulbak sets up the first chapter as oral narrative with minimal narrative distance. The story of the crippled country Jew is told in a simple syntax. The quick chronological sequence of events is presented in concrete, quotidian imagery, with the narrative parts outweighing the commentary. On the other hand, the shift from exterior to interior perspective (as in the transition from the narrator's voice to free indirect discourse) nuances somewhat the immediacy of the narrative. Dashes and a colon at the end of the first paragraph, a dash at the beginning of the indented line do not introduce direct speech, but instead refer to an inner monologue, marked by the third-person pronouns *"im"*—*"er shtelt* im *bedales"* [2]; *"Staytsh, der yung est* im *op dem kop"* [4]. The unmarked shift from the extradiegetic narrator to free indirect discourse happens already in the second sentence, with *"nefesh zaynem, vos keyn fis, nebekh, hot es nisht"* [2].

An important modeling tool is the precisely evoked oral speech with the frequent use of the conjunction "and" *(un)* at the moment of introducing actions—"un—*gevald!—er shtelt im bedales"* [2]; "un *ersht in tkhiles-vesne* […] *iz er"* [5]; "un *fun buzem hot er pamelekh genumen aroystsien"* [6]; "un *der tseknoderter tate zayner hot aroysgeburtshet"* [9]; "un *dernokh iz der yid* […] *geshtorbn"* [11]. The narrator uses the conjunction another seven times in the chapter, to link verbs, nouns, adverbs, and adjectives. To be sure, these uses of the word, in contrast to a simple introductory "and," show something of deliberate poetic textuality, since the conjunction not only serves the simple coordinative function, but also forms in miniature the biblical strategy of parallelism, something known to the poet and fiction writer from his traditional education. The parallel rhythmic arrangement of the linked words creates a complex meaning.

When the father draws the small doves "pamelekh un opgehit" [6][11] from the inner pocket of his coat, the chiastic rhythms of the two adverbs (XXX and XXX) produce no added meaning; rather, the slow tempo of the movement is rooted in the father's careful attitude toward the birds. His caring attentiveness extends the temporal dimension of the movement to encompass the quality of the relationship. We find a parallel rhythmical arrangement in "a fargangener un a tsetumlter" (X XXXX and X XXXX). The rhythmic structure synthesizes Munye's overwhelming emotion *(fargangener)* with his loss of orientation *(tsetumlter)* to produce a nearly unbearable intensity, which explains why Munye in the following sentences nearly falls unconscious. In the case of "geshmake vorkeray un fayfenish" [7], we are dealing not only, as noted above, with a complex image connecting diverse spheres of life and sensory levels, but also with a chiastic rhythmic structure (XXX and XXX) that marks the enchanting sounds as a kind of polyphonic music and allows the meaning of their positive effect on Munye to be heard as well as understood. The father's command, "hodeve un fardin gelt" [10], is chiastically mirrored in another way—XXX and XX X. Here the chiasmus gives the "and" an adversative character—raising the birds requires work, but selling them brings money. The double stress at the end of the sentence not only emphasizes the command but also has a triumphant ring to it—the joy of vanquishing the disability is heard, as by means of the birds Munye will be able to earn money on his own.

Kulbak's rhythmic modulation of the flow of speech audibly supplements the text by adding the dimension of the unspoken inner drama. The speech is slowed or dynamized according to the emotional condition, slows to a stop or allows syntactic units to proceed in a rhythmical sequence. For the sake of illustration, I offer here the whole passage with the accents notated:

> Munyes tate, a yid mit a koltenevater bord, *iz* nokh a mol, in di viste vinterd*i*ke nekht, arumgeg*a*ngen iber der shtub un graylekh arayngetr*a*kht. [1] Er hot getrakht vegn[12] dem ibergev*a*ksenem nefesh zaynem, vos keyn fis, nebekh, hot es nisht, shart zikh arum fun baginen on mitn gezes iber der kalter leymener podloge, un—geval!—er shtelt im bedales. [2] Der yid hot gantse nekht getrakht un geshpign un gemakht in der mamen arayn: [3]
> —Staytsh, der yung est im op dem kop! [4]
> Un ersht in tkhiles-vesne, ven es hot ongeh*oy*bn lozn, *iz* er, ot der koltenevater yid, arayn a mol in shtibl mit a bahaltener gdule. [5] Er hot gebrakht a bamakhtn shtayg mit feygelekh, avekgeshtelt afn tish, un fun buzem hot er pamelekh genumen aroystsien Odeser toybn, pamelekh un opgehit, vi zey voltn dortn gevaksn bay im unter di pakhves. [6] Demolt hot Munye plutsem dershmekt a maykhld*i*ke varemk*ay*t, vos hot geshlogn fun di foyglshe guflekh, a geshmake vorkeray un fayfenish azh biz trern, un er *iz* aropgekrokhn fun taptshan a fargangener un a tsetumlter. [7] Er *iz* shir nisht gefaln in khaloshes. [8] Un der tseknoderter tate zayner hot aroysgeb*u*rtshet fun tsvishn der shtekhiker un toyber bord: [9]
> —Na, klog mayner, hodeve un fardin gelt! [10]
> Un dernokh *iz* der yid, Munyes tate, geshtorbn. [11]

Rhythmic motifs create caesurae and word groups, for instance, "Munyes tate, | a yid" [1]. The movement between trochaic and iambic effects infusing the first sentence emphasizes the emotional agitation of the father in his unhappy reflections, an agitation that, in its forward and backward movement, is enacted in the body as well. The repetition of rhythmic effects not only puts speech units into a relation of similarity, but also points, as in the example of "Munyes tate" [1], "nefesh zaynem" [2], and "tate zayner" [9] (XX XX), to the reciprocal character of the emotional relation between the two speakers. The trochaic motif links other words and word groups as well, among them: "viste vinterd*i*ke nekht," [1] "nebekh, hot es nisht" [2], "est im op dem kop" [4], "ongeh*oy*bn lozn" [5], "toybn" [6], "pakhves" [6], and "maykhld*i*ke varemk*ay*t" [7]. Through this rhythmic cross-referencing, the essential stages of the narrative sequence are marked as key words, words that yield the exposition's common themes: the long winter nights of agonized reflection [1], the sympathy with the legless son [2], the father's burdens and helplessness [4], the turn in the spring [5], the solution to the problem [6], the inner solicitude [6], the successful effect of the new idea [7], not only as a possible source of income but, above all, with respect to Munye's happiness in feeling the birds' warmth, which also represents the warmth that the father himself does not show him. The father's perspective, dominant in this strand of the story, is also emphasized by the strong one-syllable cadence of both paragraphs, and by the following direct or indirect discourse (kop [4]; gelt [10]). Contrastingly, the first, long sentence devoted to Munye's experience ends with an unstressed three-syllable cadence, and the second with an unstressed two-syllable one (tsetumlter [7];

11 My analysis takes place in the context of works by Hans Lösener. Idem, Der Rhythmus in der Rede. Linguistische und literaturwissenschaftliche Aspekte des Sprachrhythmus, Tübingen 1999; idem, Zwischen Wort und Wort. Interpretation und Textanalyse, Paderborn/Munich 2006. The notation of the accents follows lexical conventions. One-syllable nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs get one accent: (X). One-syllable articles, prepositions, and pronouns get no accent: (X). Secondary accents and syllables that cannot be unambiguously classified are notated with (*X*). See idem, Der Rhythmus in der Rede, 171.

12 Syllabic "l" and "n" after a consonant are read as unaccented syllables and notated as (X).

khaloshes [8]). Munye's own speechlessness is moreover contrasted with the discursive skill of the narrator.

A sequence of three accents in a row is found at three dramatic high points of the exposition. The rhythmic insistence—X X X—is not only an expression of emotional intensity, it also indicates, as an accentual echo, the reciprocal, inward connection between father and son: "vos keyn fis, nebekh" [2] (the father's despair and helplessness regarding his unsolvable task); "azh biz trern" [7] (Munye's wordless and overwhelmed state); and "Na, klog mayner" [10] (the affection in the relieved father's direct address).

The metrical foot called an amphibrach (XXX) is common in Yiddish poetry and appears several times in this text as well, creating a songlike tone: "er shtelt im bedales" [2], where the harshness of the denoted meaning is softened by the acoustic pattern. This in turn is in counterpoint to the father's lament in the previous clauses and his coarseness in the following sentence. And then, in compensatory contrast, "bahaltener gdule" [5] ends the rhythmically varied opening sentence of the second paragraph; this introduces the action that leads to solving the problem. The soothing effect of this acoustic pattern is again made use of by the longest of the clauses being rhythmized as "pamelekh genumen aroystsien Odeser […], pamelekh un opgehit" [6], and it indicates, through the rhythmic link with "er shtelt im bedales" [2], that the father is expressing by this idiom, not so much his financial loss, as his care for his son. His gentleness in dealing with the dove chicks corresponds to the unspoken care for his son, a quality that motivates both the father's thought and his action, but remains unnarrated. The echo effect in Munye's almost "gefaln in khaloshes" [8] responds, though not in words, to the sign of paternal proximity. The repetition of this pattern at the end of the chapter gives "geshtorbn" [11], the last word, a feeling of atonement. Munye's father is reconciled to his fate, and after the doubled, increasing, and urgent anapestic motif—echoing "un—gevald!" [2]—he is, as at the beginning of the chapter, again named, though now as a person who can leave his life in tranquility: "Un dernokh *iz* der yid, Munyes tate, geshtorbn" [11]—X XX, X X X, XX XX, XXX.

In the years between 1920 and 1923, Moyshe Kulbak lived in Berlin, confronted, among other things, German Expressionism, and drew on both Romantic and Expressionist models to develop his own mode of artistic expression (fig. 3). We can assume that he read Kasimir Edschmid's manifesto *On Poetic Expressionism*.[13] Edschmid (1890–1966) states that the

13 Kasimir Edschmid delivered the talk on 13 December 1917. It was printed in 1918, in the March issue of *Die neue Rundschau. XXIXter Jahrgang der freien Bühne* 1 (1918), no. 3, 359–374.

Expressionist artist "does not describe, he experiences. He does not reproduce, he shapes. […] The facts only matter insofar as the hand of the artist, grasping through them, can reach to what is behind them."[14] Hence also the artistic interest in figures drawn from marginal groups: "[E]verything acquires a connection to the eternal. The sick man is not only the cripple who suffers. Rather he becomes sickness itself; the sorrow of all creation shines from his body and draws down the sympathy of the creator."[15]

Kulbak did in fact succeed along these lines, making palpable the concentrated sorrow of Munye's story, seen from the closest possible perspective. The crippled bird seller is raised, in spite of all local color features in the story, into the realm of the symbolic; Kulbak creates from Munye's disability, his experienced lovelessness, his being betrayed, and his powerlessness, a truly universal figure. That figure's effect on the reader goes far beyond the particular life circumstances in which the figure is situated; it grasps the reader, touches the reader, and above all moves the reader to compassion.

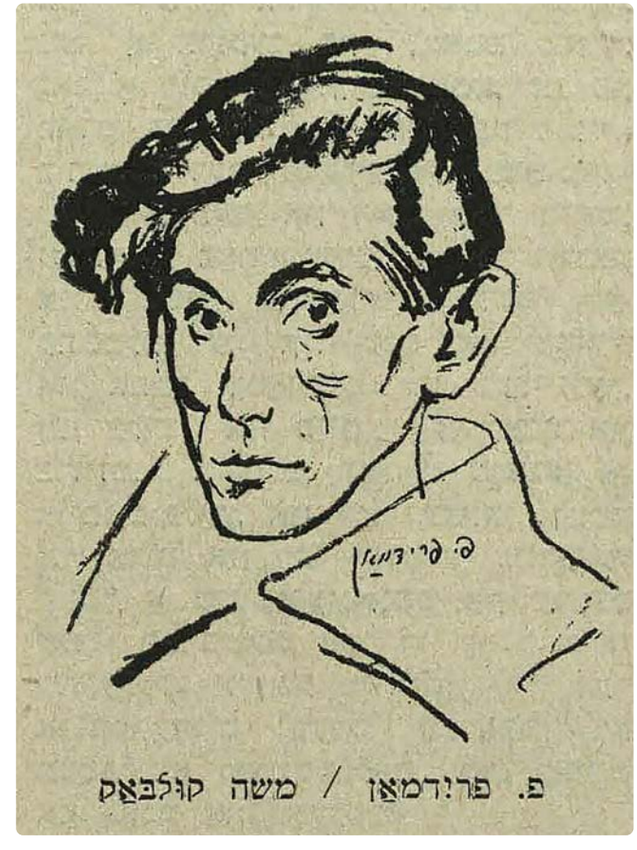


Fig. 3: Drawing of Moyshe Kulbak by F. Fridman, published in *Literarishe Bleter* on 16 January 1925.

Translated from the German by Lawrence A. Rosenwald

14 Kasimir Edschmid, Expressionismus in der Dichtung. 1918, in: Thomas Anz / Michael Stark (eds.), Manifeste und Dokumente zur deutschen Literatur, Teil: 1910–1920. Expressionismus, Stuttgart 1982, 42–55, here 46.
15 Edschmid, Expressionismus in der Dichtung, 46 f.

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Ḥayyim Lenski

ENRICO LUCCA

Always Far from the Center: Ḥayyim Lenski and Hebrew Poetry in Russia between the Wars

The name Ḥayyim Lenski may be unfamiliar to most English readers. Lenski is not as famous as other great Hebrew poets of his generation, nor has his work ever enjoyed true international repute. Only few English translations of his poems exist. Yet, there is no doubt that Lenski was among the interwar period's greatest talent. His lyrical corpus amounts to approximately 200 compositions, including poems, ballads, sonnets, and translations of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Mikhail Lermontov, and Aleksandr Pushkin. He even translated (from Russian) an adaptation of the *Jangal-maa*, a popular epic of the Mansi people—an indigenous population of Western Siberia—which he rendered in Hebrew with the name *Sefer ha-Tundra* (The Tundra Book). Lenski conceived his Hebrew works in almost complete isolation, due to the tragic circumstances of his life and the fact that, by the mid-1920s, when he began to compose the main core of his oeuvre, the center of Hebrew poetry had already moved from Russia and Central Europe to Palestine.

From the Life of a Shlimazel

Life was not kind to Ḥayyim Lenski (fig. 1). It was beset by a series of misfortunes and tragic events, which began immediately after his birth in 1905 in Slonim, a town in the Grodno region, in today's Belarus.[1] His mother, Shayna Shteynson, apparently left the family when Lenski was still a small

1 To date, the most complete biography of Lenski can be found in Vered Ariel-Nahari, Haim Lenski—An Eclectic Modernist. Individualistic Modernism vis-à-vis Poetic Transition (unpublished PhD thesis, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv 2012), 9–85 (Heb.). For some biographical information in English, see Hamutal Bar-Yosef, Was Haim Lenski a "Shlimazel"?, in: Jews and Jewish Topics in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe 15 (1991), no. 2, 48–54.

In Their Surroundings, 149–156 | doi.org/10.13109/9783666306112.149

Fig. 1: Ḥayyim Lenski, ca. 1939.

baby, after long and violent fights with her husband, Ḥayyim's father, Mordechai Yankel. Lenski would see his mother again only once. The child was brought to the house of his paternal grandparents in the village of Derechin, where he was raised in poverty. Lenski grew up speaking Yiddish and, regardless of the economic restraints of the family—his grandfather being a woodcutter and water carrier—he reported having been sent to the best cheder in town, where Tanakh was the focus of his studies. His father, who spoke to him in Russian, lived with them in Derechin for only

a brief period of time, while working as a private teacher, before he decided to move eastward. During World War I, the village was occupied by the German army. The young Lenski attended German schools and it was probably there that he acquired the language. He would declare himself a passionate reader of Goethe, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Heinrich Heine later in life.

In 1921, Lenski's grandparents died. The sixteen-year-old was sent to learn the profession of shoemaker at his aunt's house, but with no success. He decided to move to Vilna, where he was accepted as a student at the newly established Hebrew Teachers' Seminary under the patronage of the local branch of Tarbut, a Zionist educational organization. Graduates from this institution would later remember their first impression of Lenski: a young boy looking much older than his real age, wearing a long grey-brown coat similar to the ones provided by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, and unable to afford even a simple meal.[2] Although Lenski did not prove to be particularly devoted to his studies, he spent much time in the famous Strashun Library and was taken under the wing of the director of the seminary, Yehoshua Gutman. During his second year, his economic and personal situation slightly improved, and he even published his first lyrics in the students' anthology *Leket* (Collection). In 1923, Lenski interrupted his studies. First he returned to Derechin (which had become Dereczyn in the Second Polish Republic) and later, in fall that year, he decided to move to Baku, then part of the Soviet Union. He had been invited by his father, who was working there as an engineer.

Lenski illegally crossed the Russian border, was arrested by the Soviet police and imprisoned in Samara, and finally managed to escape, reaching Baku in February the following year. However, the time with his father ended in an argument and Ḥayyim decided to leave Mordechai Yankel's place. Lenski made a living as a newspaper man and private Hebrew tutor, but soon chose to move again westwards, first to Moscow and then to Leningrad (St. Petersburg), where he finally found decent employment in a steel factory with the help of the He-Ḥaluẓ training group Amal. The beginning of his correspondence with the poet Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik also dates to this time. Bialik encouraged him to continue writing, proposed to adopt the Sephardic accent, and generously lent his hand to publish some of Lenski's lyrics in the Hebrew journals and literary supplements of Palestine.

2 This is an account by Moshe Shmueli, in: Ḥayim Lenski, Me-ever nehar ha-Leteh [Across the River Lethe], ed. by Shlomo Grodzensky, Tel Aviv 1960, 209.

Joining a local group of Hebrew writers in Leningrad, among them the literary critique Yosef Matov (Saaroni), the poet Shimon Tarbukov (Ha-Bone)—married to the poet Yokheved Bat-Miriam—and the chemist Alexander Zarchin, Lenski found, for the very first time, a sense of community. The group held very idiosyncratic political views, but Lenski never showed particular interest in politics and later described himself as an anarchist. Although in some correspondence he expressed the aspiration to obtain a visa to Palestine, he was also never seriously committed to Zionism. Facing a ban of Hebrew in the Soviet Union, Lenski's poems were sent to Palestine during the 1930s, where they appeared in journals such as *Mo'znayim* (Scales), *Ketuvim* (Writings), *Gilyonot* (Sheets), or *Gazit* (Hewn Stone). Unfortunately, Lenski published very little, and very rarely did he manage to receive adequate payment for his contributions. When, toward the end of 1939, *Davar* published a first anthology of his poetry in Palestine, the news did not reach him. His correspondence with people in Palestine had stopped in 1937, and many readers believed the author had passed away.

Following a deterioration of the political situation in the Soviet Union, Lenski was subjected to frequent interrogation by the secret police and was ultimately arrested in November 1934 for his use of the Hebrew language, which was considered bourgeois and anti-revolutionary. He was sentenced to five years imprisonment and hard labor in Siberia. During his years in prison, Lenski kept writing and sending poems to his wife, Batya, whom he had married in 1929. She in turn would ship them to Palestine. Lenski even tried to reach the writer Maksim Gor'kiy, asking for his intercession.[3] Upon his release from the camps in November 1939, Lenski, who as a political prisoner had been banned from returning to his former house, took temporary residence in Malaya Vishera, a town 190 kilometers away from Leningrad. Thanks to his contacts and friends, however, he managed to spend most of his time in Leningrad regardless of the ban. In the meantime, his relationship with his wife worsened—apparently following Lenski's turn toward religious observance. To this time dates also his acquaintance with Vladimir Ioffe (1898–1979), director of the Leningrad Pasteur Institute of Epidemiology and Microbiology and himself a passionate Hebraist, whose help would become vital for Lenski's lasting legacy.

3 The content of the letter, which probably never reached its addressee, has been relayed by Joseph Berger Barzilai. For an English translation of the letter, see Yehoshua A. Gilboa, A Language Silenced. The Suppression of Hebrew Literature and Culture in the Soviet Union, New York 1982, 258f.

Lenski's Death and the Survival of His Works

It was on Ioffe's invitation that, in late 1940, Lenski drafted at least two manuscripts. The first consisted of a collection of his lyrics from 1925 to 1940—of which about two thirds had never been published; the second was his outstanding translation of Lermontov's epic poem *Mtsyri* (The Novice).[4] Less than one year later, in the summer of 1941, Lenski was stopped again by the police, this time on a general order to intercept all previous political prisoners following the Nazi invasion in late June that year. Lenski was sentenced to ten years of solitary confinement and, again, to hard labor in Siberia. There is no reliable information about his life and whereabouts after July 1942. According to official reports, Lenski's death supposedly occurred on 22 March 1943, most probably as a result of starvation, in a Gulag in the Krasnoyarsk region.

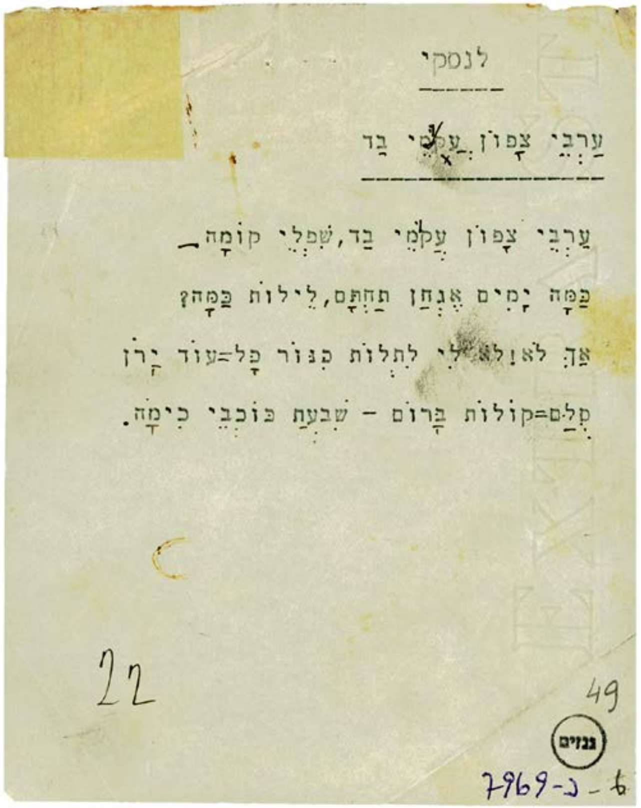
The Ioffe family kept Lenski's manuscripts safe at their own risk for almost twenty years, until 1958, when they finally succeeded in smuggling them out of the Soviet Union to Israel (**fig. 2**, **3**, and **4**). Here, the voice of the dead poet was finally made heard. The 1960 edition of Lenski's poems was followed by another four, the last one, from 2016, being the most complete.[5]

Poetry and Language

Lenski's tragic life, the almost mythological characterization of him by his contemporaries, the circumstances of his arrest, together with the miraculous survival of his works all paint the portrait of an ill-fated writer, a martyr dying for his commitment to poetry and to the Hebrew language, in which he deliberately chose to write despite its illegality and regardless of the fact that it was neither his native tongue nor the language of his environment at any given moment. Yet, it would be futile to look for traces of self-pity or resentment in Lenski's poems. On the contrary, irony is the main cypher in most of his works. At the same time, his lyrics often reflect an inclination toward demythologization paired with his anarchist sympathies.

4 A third manuscript, possibly including his ballads and poems, did not survive, or perhaps Lenski never managed to draft it.

5 For a detailed review and an evaluation of this last edition, see Jonathan Vardi, Im shire Ḥayim Lenski be-mahadurah ḥadashah [With Ḥayyim Lenski's Poems in a New Edition], in: Deḥak. Ketav-et le sifrut tova [Stress. A Journal for Literature] 7 (2016), 807–839.


לנסקי

ערבי צפון עקמי בד

ערבי צפון עקמי בד, שפלי קומה
כמה ימים אגחן תחתם, לילות כמה?
אך לא! לא לי לתלות כנור כל-עוד ירן
קלם-קולות ברום – שבעת כוכבי כימה.

Fig. 2: Typescript of the poem *Northern Willows with Crooked Branches* by Ḥayyim Lenski, undated.

In particular, Lenski's opposition to epic tones stands out in his Leningrad cycle, which includes the ten so-called *Sonetot Petropolis* (Petropolis Sonnets) and two poems: *Delator* (Informer)—to a great extent satirical—and *Galba*. Written between 1928 and 1933, these compositions attest to Lenski's anti-imperialist views and to his attempt to undermine the myth of the metropolis in the name of his own foreignness (as, for example, in the first sonnet: "I am a son of Lithuania, and young brother of the Białowieża's dove. […] What do I have to do then with the banks of the river Neva?"). It is no surprise that the Neva, the river flowing through the city of St. Petersburg, is called by the Hebrew word *"ye'or"* (river), hinting at the biblical rivers of Jewish exile. Yet, Lenski identifies the homeland he is longing for as the village where he grew up, a place near the forests and far from the big city and from imperial grandeur.[6] Of the ten sonnets composing the Leningrad cycle, only two—the fifth and the sixth—were published during Lenski's lifetime, in November 1930, in the journal *Mo'znayim*. The poem *Delator* appeared in the literary supplement of *Davar* on 12 May 1933, and *Galba* in the journal *Gazit* in 1934.

Even where Lenski abandons his wit in favor of more nostalgic tones—in the description of the countryside of his homeland in the autobiographical poem *Lita* (Lithuania), for example—his references to nature and elegiac tropes are never pathetic or loaded with metaphysical undertones. On the contrary, they remain very concrete.

6 On this aspect, see Rafi Tsirkin-Sadan, The Curse of the Forbidden City. Haim Lensky's St. Petersburg Sonatas and the Images of St. Petersburg in Russian and Hebrew Literature, in: Meḥkerei Yerushalayim be-sifrut ivrit/Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature 30 (2019), 121–142 (Heb.).

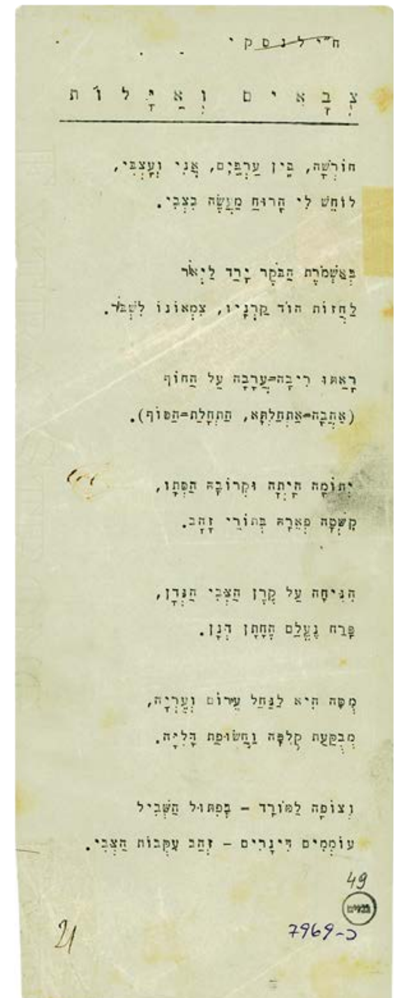

לנסקי

מעריב היום על האגם

מעריב היום על האגם.
הדנה ירדה לנום בעמק.
כבר שבתו עופות מלהגם.
מה עגום ברשרושו הגמא!

הד קול מה והד קול מי קובל
בקנים המפרפסים האלה?
הן שמם החוף, מימי תבל
לא דרכה עליו כף רגל הלך.

על ימים שמשם שקעה מכבר,
על כפוף שלא נתן לו אמר,
על גדוד הסים ואוז-הבר, –
על כל זה לוחש ליאור הגמא.


ח. לנסקי

צבאים ואילות

חורשה, בין ערבים, אני ועצבי,
לוחש לי הרוח מעשה בצבי.

באשמרת הבקר ירד ליאור
לחזות הוד קרניו, צמאונו לשבר.

ראתו ריבה-ערבה על החוף
(אהבה-אתחלתא, תתחלת-הסוף).

יתומה היתה וקרובה הפתו,
קשתה פארה בתורי זהב.

הניחה על קרן הצבי הנדן,
פרח נעלם החתן הנו.

מפה היא לנחל עירום ועריה,
מבקשת קלפה נחשופת דליה.

נצופה למורד – בפתול השביל
עוממים דינרים – זהב עקבות הצבי.

Fig. 3: Typescript of the poem *The Evening Falls by the Lake.* The poem was written by Ḥayyim Lenski in January/February 1935.

Fig. 4: First page from the typescript of the poem *Gazelles and Does* by Ḥayyim Lenski. The title reminds of a verse from the Song of Songs (2:7). The poem was first published in the journal *Mo'znayim* (7 April 1932).

Besides taking inspiration from numerous lyrical forms of Russian folklore, his poems and lyrics present a unique mixture of high and complex Hebrew—his "southern language," as he would call it—and Yiddish idioms, as well as, at times, direct quotations in other languages (German, Russian, or Polish). Lenski's work reveals his constant dialogue with the Russian and European coeval literary currents, making them an essential component of his very peculiar modernist poetics.[7]

7 See, for example, Vered Ariel-Nahari, Haim Lenski. Seemingly Romantic, Essentially Modernist, in: Alina Molisak/Shoshana Ronen (eds.), The Trilingual Literature of Polish Jews from Different Perspectives. In Memory of I. L. Peretz, Newcastle upon Tyne 2017, 88–97.

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RAFI TSIRKIN-SADAN

Hebrew Verse and the End of St. Petersburg: A Close Reading of Ḥayyim Lenski's *Ha-yom yarad* (The Day Came Down, ca. 1930)

During his short literary career, Ḥayyim Lenski devoted many poems to the city of Leningrad: ten sonnets and two longer poems titled *Delator* (Informer, 1930) and *Galba* (1933). The extensive representation of Leningrad/St. Petersburg in Lenski's poems was unprecedented in the Eastern European chapter of Hebrew literature, which was usually anchored in towns or cities within the Pale of Settlement. Moreover, Lenski's Leningrad cycle relates directly to the Petersburg text (Vladimir Toporov) of Russian literature rather than central issues of Hebrew or Yiddish literatures of that time.

This paper focuses on the seventh sonnet of Lenski's Leningrad cycle, *Ha-yom yarad* (The Day Came Down), written approximately in 1930 and first published in 1939.[1] The sonnet was translated into English by the Israeli poet and translator T. Carmi (Carmi Charney).[2] As is the case with most translated poetry, Carmi's translation lacks some of the original prosodic and semantic nuances. The word "river" does not convey the full meaning of the Hebrew word *"ye'or,"* which usually refers to the Nile or the Tigris but in Lenski's sonnet to the Neva River in St. Petersburg. Moreover, his sonnet evokes biblical associations of exile and national humiliation. The translation of the names of St. Petersburg monuments, such as the Admiralty (the headquarters of the Russian Imperial Navy), from Hebrew into English is not accurate. Where the English version merely describes "the roof of the Admiralty," the original details the sharp tip of the building whose spire rises seventy meters high. The ship at the tip of this spire is one of St. Petersburg's famous symbols (**fig. 1**).

1 Ḥayim Lenski, Shire Ḥayim Lenski [Poems by Ḥayyim Lenski], Tel Aviv 1939, 33.
2 Ḥayim Lenski, The Day Came Down, in: T. Carmi (ed.), The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse, Harmondsworth 1981, 543.

In Their Surroundings, 157–170 | doi.org/10.13109/9783666306112.157

היום ירד

הַיּוֹם יָרַד בְּמַדְרֵגוֹת הָאֶבֶן
לְהִתְכּוֹל מֵימֵי הַיְאוֹר לִרְחֹץ. וּבְטֶרֶם
כְּלָה לִטְבֹּל צָלַל פִּי תְהוֹם וְתָלֶם
גַּלִּים עָבַר בְּתַהֲלוּכַת אֵבֶל.

יָרְדָה דְמָמָה שְׁלֵמָה וַחֲצִי אֹפֶל.
וַעֲגָלָה מוּפֶזֶת וּמַזְהֶרֶת
שָׁקְעָה כִּפַּת אִיסַאקִי בְּזֶרֶם
כְּפַעֲמוֹן אֲמוּדַאִים מְשֻׁלְשֶׁלֶת חֶבֶל.

וּכְמוֹ כַדּוּם זָהָב מְנַשֵּׁשׁ בַּמַּיִם
חוּד גַּג הָאַדְמִירָלְיָה. בְּעִבּוּעַ, —
שׁוֹטֵף הַיְאוֹר בְּזוֹהַר בֵּין עַרְבַּיִם.

הוּעָל הַמֵּת. הִנֵּהוּ הַשָּׁבוּעַ, —
אָרוֹךְ, לְבָן פָּנִים וּכְחוּל שְׂפָתַיִם
"הַלַּיְלָה הַלָּבָן" כֹּה יִקְרָאוּהוּ.[3]

The Day Came Down

The day came down the stone steps to bathe in the blue waters of the river, but it had scarcely immersed itself when it plunged into the depths. And a furrow of waves passed by in funeral procession.

Then complete silence and half-darkness descended; and round, gilded, glowing—the dome of St Isaac sank into the stream like a diving-bell lowered by a cable.

And like a ball of gold, the roof of the Admiralty, spires and all, gropes through the water. A gurgle. The river flows in the twilight glow.

Now the corpse has been hauled up, here is the one who drowned: long, white-faced and blue-lipped. "The White Night"—that is how he's known.[4]

3 Lenski, Shire Ḥayim Lenski, 33.
4 Lenski, The Day Came Down, 543.

The sharp tip of the Admiralty building also appears in Osip Mandel'shtam's poem *Admiralteystvo* (The Admiralty Tower, 1913) which serves as a major intertext of Lenski's sonnet. *Ha-yom yarad* also corresponds with other seminal representations of St. Petersburg in Russian literature, first and foremost Aleksandr Pushkin's *Mednyy vsadnik. Peterburgskaya povest'* (The Bronze Horseman. A Petersburg Tale, 1833). The flood mentioned in Lenski's poem recalls the flood in Pushkin's classical poem, which many scholars consider the first chapter in the long tradition of the Petersburg text, evoking images, monuments, and streets of Russia's imperial capital.[5] Both floods have a factual basis, referring to the two big floods in St. Petersburg's history: Lenski's to the 1924 flood, Pushkin's to the 1824 one. Much happened in St. Petersburg between the two floods. The city is not the same after the first disaster: It is no longer the capital of an empire but the seat of a new regime, and it has a different name—Leningrad.

Fig. 1: The Admiralty in St. Petersburg in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Naturally, St. Petersburg's literary image has seen numerous transformations over the course of its turbulent history. Nikolay Gogol', Fëdor Dostoevskiy, Aleksandr Blok, Anna Akhmatova, Osip Mandel'shtam—the list of authors who contributed to the Petersburg text, capturing the demo-

5 Nikolay Antsyferov, Nepostizhimyy gorod [The Incomprehensible City], Leningrad 1991; Yuriy Lotman, Simvolika Peterburga i problemy semiotiki goroda [The Symbolics of St. Petersburg and Problems of the City's Semiotics], in: idem, Istoriya i tipologiya russkoy kul'tury [History and Typology of Russian Culture], St. Peterburg 2002, 208–220; Vladimir Toporov, Peterburgskiy tekst russkoy literatury. Izbrannye trudy [The Petersburg Text of Russian Literature. Selected Works], Moscow 2003.

graphic, economic, and political changes in the city and in Russia, is long. The sonnet *Ha-yom yarad* by Ḥayyim Lenski belongs to the dark chapter of the Petersburg text following the October Revolution. The last line of its first stanza describes the sunset in the city as "a furrow of waves passed by in funeral procession." Alongside allusions to ancient Jewish history, *Ha-yom yarad* also conjures an apocalyptic vision of the city's destruction reflecting the postrevolutionary phase of Russian history.

Therefore, *Ha-yom yarad* must be read within the overlapping contexts of both modern Hebrew poetry and Petersburg text of Russian literature. At first glance, the reference in Hebrew to the Petersburg text seems to create a contact zone and shared space between Russian and Hebrew literatures. However, Lenski entirely destroys that space: The word *"ye'or"* alone connotes the enslavement of the People of Israel in Egypt and the Babylon Exile and thus creates an overall negative undertone. At this point, one may ask: Does the "northern *ye'or*," that is, the Neva which crosses St. Petersburg, also represent a place of exile to the poet? If so, exile from where? Exile from the Land of Israel? Exile from his birthplace?

Much like the Russian authors born outside the city, such as Nikolay Gogol', Lenski portrays St. Petersburg as a menace. He did not identify with the city's revolutionary present either: In his Leningrad cycle, the communist revolution has failed to build a new and just world. In Lenski's imagination, ordinary people, in particular new immigrants from the province, suffer much more under Communist than under Tsarist rule. The sixth sonnet of the cycle describes the hardships of production workers in Leningrad. It is clearly based on Lenski's personal experience during the relatively liberal period preceding Stalinism. In many ways, his view challenges Yuri Slezkine's narrative of the revolution as a golden age of Russian Jewry.[6]

Moreover, Lenski's sense of estrangement from the city, which is palpable throughout his oeuvre, culminates in a radical metaphorical act of dismantling the Russian imperial subject itself. Lenski utilizes a rhetoric which borrows from the theory of the carnivalesque as defined by Mikhail Bakhtin in his seminal *Rabelais and His World*.[7] The use of carnival language, such as profanity and parody, in Lenski's Leningrad poems is aimed both at imperial monuments in the urban space and representations of the imperial capital in the Russian literary canon. He reverses the traditional function of the sonnet, which is to praise and romanticize an object of affection (see Petrarca, Shakespeare, or Pushkin), and expresses hatred

6 Yuri Slezkine, The Jewish Century, Princeton, N. J., 2004.

7 Mikhail Bakhtin, Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable i narodnaya kul'tura srednevekov'ya i Renessansa [The Works of François Rabelais and Folk Culture of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance], Orange, Conn., 1986.

and rage against the city, even hope for the destruction of the Russian Empire as a whole.

In the second and third stanzas of *Ha-yom yarad*, the disappearance of imperial monuments—the St. Isaac's Cathedral and the Admiralty—in the floods of the river serves as synecdoche for the doom of the Russian Empire. Arguably, the whole city functions as such. St. Petersburg must disappear together with the empire. The anarchist tendency is even clearer in other sonnets in the cycle. For example, the fifth sonnet summons Gulliver to destroy the city, and only the latter's seasonal cold prevents him from doing so. The connection between the capital and the empire begs the question of Lenski's attitude towards the imperial theme in Russian literature in general.

As Harsha Ram points out in his *The Imperial Sublime. A Russian Poetics of Empire*, modern Russian literature emerged at the same time as the Russian Empire.[8] Moreover, the beginning of the imperial chapter in Russia's history coincided with the state's growing affinity for the classical tradition in art. The abundance of classical-style monuments in St. Petersburg, built to the glory of the Romanovs, certainly inspired Lenski's poetic accounts of Russia's imperial might. In other words, in order to understand Lenski's literary position, we have to examine the relationship between the Russian poetics of empire and the Petersburg text.

Russian Poetics of the Empire

Enchantment with the empire characterizes the works of many Russian poets and writers of the eighteenth century. They applauded the diplomatic and military achievements of the Russian state and used them to expand their poetic repertoire. The great nineteenth-century literary critic Vissarion Belinskiy wrote that Mikhail Lomonosov's 1739 ode to the conquest of the city of Khotin on the Black Sea coast was the first Russian poem written with the right prosody. Lomonosov had also penned an ode to the unveiling of a statue of Peter the Great. In fact, odes praising Peter the Great and the achievements of his successors became a dominant genre in Russian poetry in that period.

According to Harsha Ram, eighteenth-century Russian odes that followed classicist conventions made a significant contribution to the construction of the Russian imperial subject.[9] St. Petersburg functions in eighteenth-century and even early nineteenth-century poetry as an epitome of

8 Harsha Ram, The Imperial Sublime. A Russian Poetics of Empire, Madison, Wis., 2003.

9 Ram, The Imperial Sublime, 63–120.

Fig. 2: The statue of Peter the Great with the St. Isaac's Cathedral in the background, 1905.

the empire, as the very essence of the "imperial sublime." Yet, St. Petersburg's glorious image began to crack in the 1820s and 1830s with the Romantic turn of Russian literature. Now, St. Petersburg was portrayed as a city of "tragic imperialism" that was cut off from the rest of Russia.[10]

Pushkin's *Mednyy vsadnik* clearly illustrates this turn. It opens with an ode to Peter the Great, whose statue serves as the city's genius loci and symbol of the Russian imperial project (fig. 2). Pushkin writes, "'Here cut'—so Nature gives command—'Your window through on Europe […]'."[11] While this line praises the emperor for overcoming the forces of nature, including the Russian people's resistance to European civilization,

10 Antsyferov, Nepostizhimyy gorod.

11 Aleksandr Pushkin, The Bronze Horseman, transl. by Oliver Elton, in: The Poems, Prose and Plays by Alexander Pushkin, ed. by Avrahm Yarmolinsky, New York 1936, 95–110, here 95.

the rest of the poem casts a negative light on St. Petersburg and hence Peter the Great's legacy as a whole. The city appears as a source of suffering for its residents. The miserable life of Evgeniy, the protagonist of the poem, has nothing to do with imperial glory: "So, home Evgeny came, and tossed / His cloak aside; undressed; and sinking / Sleepless upon his bed, was lost / In sundry meditations—thinking / Of what?—How poor he was […]."[12] After his fiancée's death in the flood, poor Evgeniy loses his sanity and imagines Peter the Great's statue chasing him around the city.

It is as if the poet asks: Who is crazy here? The poor clerk, who wants nothing but a normal life, a simple dream crushed by the empire, or Peter the Great, who built his capital at an impossible location, sacrificing thousands of people in the process? Pushkin was an imperial patriot despite his republican views. In many of his poems, he praises the Russian Imperial Army and the territorial expansion. At the same time, he was also aware of the rift between the state and the people, as *Mednyy vsadnik* shows, which dramatically redefines the relation between poet and imperial rule. The poet persona he creates is not only an imperial ideologist but also a prophet who speaks on behalf of history and people. The emperor could not ignore this challenge: Pushkin was banished from the metropolis. The dynamics created after the prophetic turn in Russian poetry were repeated time and again in the history of Russian literature. There was hardly a Russian poet who did not eventually feel the wrath of the state and was exiled from St. Petersburg for a while.

These dynamics also reflected on the image of St. Petersburg, which stopped functioning as the epitome of "imperial sublime." The city's negative image was reinforced in Russian Romantic and Realist prose, especially by Gogol' and Dostoevskiy. Later, at the turn of the twentieth century, Symbolist poets continued to describe the city in a similarly negative vein. However, all these negative images did not result in the weakening of the Russian imperial subject, which served as the driving force of the city since its foundation. After the October Revolution, followed by the violation of many monuments, Symbolist poets who had cursed the city before became its greatest proponents.

The Acmeists, headed by Osip Mandel'shtam, never shared that hatred toward St. Petersburg. Quite the opposite. The Acmeists emphasized the Apollonian element of culture and adored the art of architecture. They often drew a connection between poetry and architecture. *Kamen'* (The Stone), the title of Mandel'shtam's first collection of poems, published in 1913, refers to the dominant element in the city's landscape. Mandel'shtam

12 Pushkin, The Bronze Horseman, 98.

dedicated many poems to St. Petersburg before and after the revolution. For this paper, his poem *Admiralteystvo*, completed in 1913, is of particular importance:

The Admiralty

> The Admiralty Tower
>
> The northern capital, a poplar tree droops, dusty,
> a transparent clock-dial tangled in leaves,
> and through dark foliage a frigate, an acropolis
> shines in the distance, brother to water, brother to sky.
>
> An air-boat, a mast no one can touch,
> a measure for Peter's heirs,
> and his lesson: a demigod's whim is not beauty,
> but the predatory eye of a carpenter, is.
>
> Four elements united, rule us, are friendly,
> but free man made the fifth.
> This chaste-constructed ark: isn't the
> superiority of space denied?
>
> Capricious jellyfish cling, angry;
> anchors rot, abandoned like ploughs—
> and there, the three dimensions burst their bonds
> and universal oceans open.[13]

Only a poet raised in St. Petersburg could write like this. The two images in the first stanza are particularly interesting: first, the "transparent clock-dial" in the Admiralty tower, which possibly hints at the end of time; and second, the image of the Admiralty building as an acropolis and frigate connecting classical architecture with the empire. The juxtaposing of these two images suggests the stopping of time and the end of history, and as such the destruction of the empire. The poem is a prophecy of destruction. Yet, it could also be interpreted as a eulogy to the founder of the Russian imperial project. *Admiralteystvo* explicitly laments Peter the Great's imperial project, which overcame the forces of nature and the laws of physics. His success encouraged other rulers and architects to construct

13 Osip Mandelstam, The Admiralty Tower, in: Complete Poetry of Osip Emilevich Mandelstam, transl. by Burton Raffel and Alla Burago with an introduction and notes by Sidney Monas, Albany, N. Y., 1973, 58 f.

Fig. 3: Postcard of St. Petersburg with a view of the Neva River and the Admiralty, ca. 1900.

magnificent monuments, manifestations of free artistic spirit, such as the Admiralty building (fig. 3).

Peter the Great appears in the poem as a creative role model. The passion for construction which motivates him overcomes the elements of air, earth, water, and fire. Thanks to his passion, which is also the passion for spatial conquest, Peter the Great manages to build the ark (at the end of the third stanza). The ark in *Admiralteystvo* is not merely a ship but a vessel of memory and cultural property to be filled with works of art and literature, that is, everything that belongs to the poet's world. In Mandel'shtam's imagination, the emperor and poet seem to complement each other, even though the former needs the latter more, for the artist must bestow meaning onto the sovereign's deeds and achievements. The poet, on the other hand, cannot avoid participating in the imperial project. The last lines, "and there, the three dimensions burst their bonds / and universal oceans open," clearly links the passion for construction and the quest for universal dominion. His vision seems greatly inspired by empire-building theory, although an empire serves here first and foremost as a major catalyst of civilization.

Ḥayyim Lenski's *Ha-yom yarad* and the End of St. Petersburg

In contrast to Mandel'shtam, Lenski drew heavily on destruction theory. He must have taken Mikhail Bakunin's famous statement, "the passion for destruction is a creative passion," to heart. The first stage of the empire's destruction is the imaginary obliteration of the city. In almost all poems of his Leningrad cycle, Lenski evokes the raging waters of the Neva River destroying the urban space. In some poems, the declaration of the event is followed by an exclamation mark. Yet, in the sonnet *Ha-yom yarad*, where the same scenario unfolds, the observer's tone is not malicious but a little grim. After all, the apocalypse, though an imaginary one, is a terrifying event. The opening lines suggest that time has stopped: "The day came down the stone steps to / bathe in the blue waters of the river." This end of history could be dated to a day in October 1917, although, in the poem, St. Petersburg is destroyed by weather and natural disaster rather than as a result of historical developments. As mentioned before, Mandel'shtam's poem creates a similar vision of timelessness. But in Lenski's poem, it is linked to the image of a mythical flood which swallows up the imperial monuments conceived by Peter the Great. Lenski does not even hint at Peter the Great's passion for construction and he refrains from portraying the tsar as victor over the powers of chaos. In his vision, St. Petersburg disappears entirely into the abyss. The first to sink is St. Isaac's Cathedral, built between 1818 and 1858 in honor of Nicholas I. It is followed by the Admiralty building, the very monument which inspired Mandel'shtam's image of "imperial sublime." Despite their different views of St. Petersburg, it cannot be concluded that Lenski rejects Mandel'shtam's poetics completely. In fact, he borrows a lot from Mandel'shtam, in particular the usage of concrete images. In this sense, it would be no exaggeration to say that he turns Mandel'shtam's art of the poem against his vision of empire and poetry.

Ha-yom yarad ends with a disturbing surreal vision: "Now the corpse has been hauled up, / here is the one who drowned: long / white-faced and blue-lipped. 'The / White Night'—that is how he's known." The space that St. Petersburg once occupied is now sunk in chaos. With the entire city submerged under water, the corpse pulled from the water is bobbing on the waves. It is referred to as "the White Night," alluding to Dostoevskiy's famous novella *Belye nochi* (White Nights), and could be interpreted as the dead body of the Petersburg text or Russian literature at large. Hebrew literature, on the other hand, seems very much alive, since the only survivor of the flood is the Hebrew-speaking observer who is writing the history of the last days of St. Petersburg.

Speaking of the observer, there is no indication as to where he might stand to witness the city's doom—the place is destroyed, even time has stopped—giving him the appearance of a transcendent persona out of space and time. He watches history unfold from a position that surrounds him, and the poet himself, with a prophetic aura. The choice of Hebrew for his account, however, does not necessarily imply the embracement of the prophetic mode of modern Hebrew poetry.[14] While Lenski's poems were undeniably written in the language of the biblical prophets, whose words provided a thematic basis to Russian poets as well—above all, the call for justice and protection of the weak—there is good reason to believe that Lenski's "prophetic aura" builds on Russian literary tradition. It is clear that he did not adopt the Russian prophetic mode as it is. He confronted this mode with its own fundamental assumptions, thereby pushing it toward radicalization. Lenski supports Pushkin's call to stand by the victims of the imperial project (such as the poor clerk in *Mednyy vsadnik*) but, unlike him, he cannot condone the system and acknowledge its greatness regardless. With this refusal, he escalates the confrontation between poet and imperial rule. Lenski's attempt to radicalize the Russian prophetic mode thus reconnects him to the biblical roots of the prophetic tradition in Western culture. Lenski did not strictly associate the prophetic tradition with Jerusalem and the Land of Israel. In his mind, it could be sustained anywhere, even in the Russian imperial periphery in Eastern Europe.

From St. Petersburg to the Woods of Belovezh: Lenski's Vision of Peaceful Coexistence

In the third sonnet of his Leningrad cycle, Lenski depicts a Russian emperor, probably Peter the Great, falling off his mare, which rears up at the sight of a wild bison from the Białowieża (Belovezh) Forest stretching across Lithuania, Poland, and Belarus (fig. 4). It is a parody of Peter the Great's representations in arts and literature. The sonnet also insinuates some kind of erotic desire between the Russian mare and the Belovezh wild bison. It seems that, in order to act on their mutual attraction, they must get rid of the emperor first. In this sonnet, Lenski dismantles Russian dominance—with St. Petersburg as its center—over Eastern Europe. He also reinterprets the region as a contact zone between the different ethnic groups based on equality and peace. Lenski's idyll has no room for imperial power. The bison, which represents the Eastern European imperial periphery, has no

14 Dan Miron, H. N. Bialik and the Prophetic Mode in Modern Hebrew Poetry, Syracuse, N. Y., 2000.

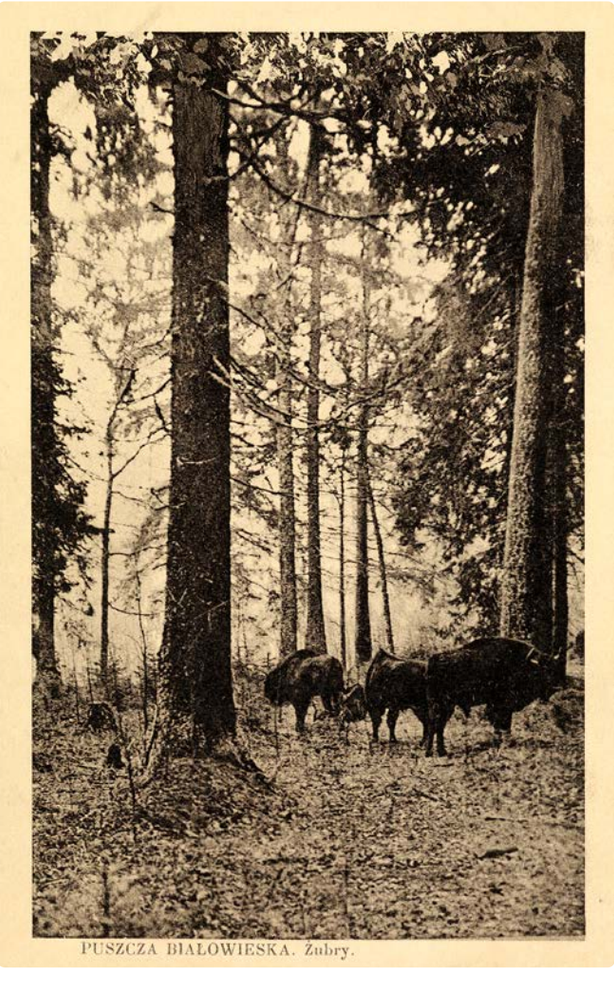

Fig. 4: European bison in the Białowieża (Belovezh) Forest in the 1930s.

Jewish or any other identity: It is a Jewish, Lithuanian, Polish, and Belarusian hybrid, wild and potent. Lenski, who was born and raised nearby the Belovezh Forest, could have found himself in prison for this poem alone. NKVD officials, many of whom literate in Hebrew, could have also interpreted it as an expression of Polish patriotism.

Lenski was not a Polish patriot. Where he chose his birthplace, amidst the forests of Poland, Lithuania, and Belarus, as setting for his poems, he spoke for all of the region's population: Jews, Belarusians, Lithuanians, and Poles. At first glance, his literary position seems exceptional. But Jewish literature in Eastern Europe has many examples of local patriotism, even alongside radical nationalist views. Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky comes to mind, the founder of the Revisionist movement, who was also a great local patriot of Odessa.[15] Shaul Tchernichovsky has always regarded his own poetry as connected to his birthplace Mikhailovka.[16] It is possible that, by demonstrating local patriotism, Lenski sought to add something he felt was missing or oppressed, first by Tsarist rule and later by Stalin, in the representation of Eastern European experience in the Western parts of the Russian Empire.

15 Dmitry Shumsky, An Odessan Nationality? Local Patriotism and Jewish Nationalism in the Case of Vladimir Jabotinsky, in: The Russian Review 79 (2020), no. 1, 64–82.

16 Ido Bassok, Le-yofi ve-nisgav libo er. Shaul Tshernikhovski—ḥayim [Of Beauty and Sublime Aware. Sha'ul Tchernichovsky—a Life], Jerusalem 2017.

As Terry Martin shows, while the early Bolshevik authorities granted a great measure of cultural autonomy to the peoples of the former Tsarist empire, Stalin's rise to power signified the return to the prerevolutionary policy of Russification.[17] As argued above, Lenski did not distinguish between the Romanovs and the Bolsheviks. In his second sonnet of the Leningrad cycle, he writes, "The October storm is over, the city was renamed / but the world keeps on turning." Nothing has changed. The oppressive imperial regime continues under a different name. There is no reason for the local to leave his homeland and lead a miserable life in the big city. The idyll exists in the periphery. Contrary to Russian-born Hebrew poets and writers, such as Tchernichovsky and Jabotinsky, Lenski's disappointment in Russia did not lead him to embrace Zionist ideology. It is doubtful whether Lenski's poetry contains any ideological aspects that could be categorized as diasporic nationalism. As we have seen, even his usage of the Hebrew language bears a universal meaning. Therefore, his anti-imperialist rhetoric is first and foremost an expression of the supra-ethnic patriotism in the Western provinces of the Russian Empire.

For an expanded Hebrew version of this essay, see The Curse of the Forbidden City. Haim Lensky's St. Petersburg Sonatas and the Images of St. Petersburg in Russian and Hebrew Literature, in: Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature 30 (2019), 121–142 (Heb.).

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Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky

TETYANA YAKOVLEVA

"I Am the Child of My Time": Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky

There are many avenues of research into Jabotinsky's life. Vladimir (Volf in Yiddish, Ze'ev in Hebrew) Jabotinsky was a complex man, a man of many talents, who left a profound impression on his contemporaries and descendants with each and every one of his projects. He was active in many countries: In the Yishuv, Jabotinsky was a Zionist leader who defended the right of the Jewish people to their historic home and self-defense; in France, he was an intellectual among the Russian émigrés and a member of one of the most influential Masonic lodges;[1] and in Russia, he worked as a journalist, poet, translator, novelist, and publicist. This introduction is devoted to the literary life of Jabotinsky with a focus on his Russian-language works and the influence of Odessa on his oeuvre.

From the Life of a Russian Journalist

Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky was born on 18 October 1880 in Odesa, then Odessa, part of the Pale of Settlement, at the Southern border of the Russian Empire (fig. 1). Unlike other cities of the empire, Odessa was cosmopolitan in character and not barred for Jews. By the end of the nineteenth century, Jews made up a third of its population. Many prominent Jewish intellectuals lived in the city, organized in a cultural circle also known as "The Wise Men of Odessa."[2] As a result, Odessa became a thriving center of modern Jewish culture, expressed in Russian, Hebrew, and Yiddish. Growing up in a Russian-speaking family, Jabotinsky was raised hearing Yiddish and reading Hebrew. His Hebrew teacher was one of the "Wise

1 Oleg Gorn, Zhabotinskiy. "Severnaya zvezda" Siona [Jabotinsky. "North Star" of Zion], in: Zametki po evreyskoy istorii [Notes on Jewish History] 164 (2013), no. 5, <http://berkovich-zametki.com/2013/Zametki/Nomer5/Gorn1.php> (31 July 2022).

2 Efraim Sicher, Babel' in Context. A Study in Cultural Identity, Boston, Mass., 2012, 108–113; Karl Schlögel, Entscheidung in Kiew. Ukrainische Lektionen, Munich 2015, 131–134.

In Their Surroundings, 173–182 | doi.org/10.13109/9783666306112.173

Fig. 1: Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky, 1903.

Men," the publisher and writer Yehoshua Ḥana Rawnitzki. At the age of ten, Jabotinsky began to write poems in Russian, which were distributed in an unofficial handwritten schoolpaper.

In 1896, Jabotinsky translated part of the *Shir ha-shirim* (Song of Songs) and of the poem *Bi-meẓulot yam* (In the Depths of the Sea) by Yehuda Leib Gordon from Hebrew into Russian. His sister taught him English, a skill he later used to translate Edgar Allan Poe's poem *The Raven* into Russian *(Voron)*. The translation was published in 1903 in the popular anthology *Chtets-deklamator. Khudozhestvennyy sbornik* (The Reciter. Literary Compilation) and became a classic along with other translations of poets of the Silver Age, such as Dmitriy Merezhkovskiy and Valeriy Bryusov. In 1914, Jabotinsky published Poe's *The Raven* in Hebrew, creating the first ever verse compositions that used a new Hebrew accent based on the Sephardic stress system.[3] Thanks to Jabotinsky, Poe became associated with Zionism in Hebrew literary culture.[4]

In 1897, Jabotinsky wrote his first article, *Pedagogicheskie zamechaniya* (Pedagogical Remarks), which appeared in the daily *Yuzhnoe Obozrenie* (Southern Review) and criticized the Russian school grading system. Without finishing his high school education, he began working as a freelance foreign correspondent for the daily *Odesskiy Listok* (Odessa Leaflet) in 1898. Jabotinsky then moved to Bern, where he continued to write for the paper while enrolling in law school at the university. Before transferring to Rome in 1898, he composed *Gorod mira* (The City of Peace), a poem about Jerusalem, which appeared in the St. Petersburg Jewish monthly *Voskhod* (Dawn). Aleksandr Pushkin and Mikhail Lermontov exerted considerable influence on him by that time. During his stay in Rome, he switched from *Odesskiy Listok* to another daily, *Odesskie Novosti* (Odessa News), and adopted the pen name Altalena ("swing" in Italian) to sign his feuilletons. Jabotinsky's pieces were mettlesome and popular. Italy shaped his spiritual development and perception of humanity; it also inspired his concept of Jewish nationalism. In 1901, his Italian articles were printed in the local press: *Anton Cekhof e Massimo Gorki. L'impressionismo nella letteratura russa* (Anton Chekhov and Maksim Gor'kiy. Impressionism in Russian Literature) in *Avanti!* (Forward!) and *Mitologia russa* (Russian Mythology) in *Nuova Antologia* (New Anthology), other articles in the weekly *Roma Letteraria* (Literary Rome) and in the right-leaning paper *La Tribuna* (The Tribune).

3 Miryam Segal, A New Sound in Hebrew Poetry. Poetics, Politics, Accent, Bloomington, Ind., 2010, xv–xvii.

4 Karen Grumberg, "Dreaming Dreams No Mortal Ever Dared to Dream Before." Poe, Degeneration, and Revolution in the Hebrew Imagination, in: Poe Studies. History, Theory, Interpretation 53 (2020), 47–65, here 47f.

Jabotinsky returned to Odessa in 1901, already a famous journalist, with the desire to finish his law degree. However, he was offered the chance to write a daily column for *Odesskie Novosti*, *Vskol'z'* (At a Glance), and postponed his studies. In the same year, his first play in verse, *Krov'* (Blood), about the ongoing Second Boer War between the British Empire and the two Boer republics in South Africa, was staged at the Odessa Theater. In 1902, the theater presented Jabotinsky's second play in verse, *Ladno* (Fine), about the bohemian lifestyle of Italian students. The plays were not very successful. The same year, he wrote the poem *Bednaya Sharlotta* (Poor Charlotte) about Charlotte Corday's terrorist act during the French Revolution, which was printed by Maksim Gor'kiy's publishing house *Znanie* (Knowledge) in 1904 in St. Petersburg. In the spring of 1902, he was arrested for the first time—for the possession of several issues of the Italian Socialist paper *Avanti!*, which had published his articles.

A Turning Point in Jabotinsky's Life

In 1903, Jabotinsky read *Auto-Emancipation!* by Leon Pinsker as well as the writings of Theodor Herzl and Moses Leib Lilienblum, and he actively participated in organizing and funding the Jewish self-defense corps in Odessa (fig. 2). He created a free Russian interpretation of Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik's Hebrew poem *Be-ir ha-harigah* (In the City of Slaughter) about the pogrom in Kishinëv, which was published in the Russian Zionist monthly *Evreyskaya Zhizn'* (The Jewish Life) in St. Petersburg the following year. His version of the text, *Skazanie o pogrome* (The Tale of the Pogrom), introduced the Russian reader to Bialik and to the horrors of the anti-Jewish pogrom.[5] Around the turn of the year 1903/04, he left Odessa for St. Petersburg and became one of the editors of the monthly *Evreyskaya Zhizn'* and the weekly *Khronika Evreyskoy Zhizni* (The Chronicle of Jewish Life), composing articles on Zionism and the rights of Russian Jewry.

Fig. 2: The building in Pochtovaya Street in Odesa, where Jabotinsky lived from 1901 to 1903.

5 Mikhail Osorgin, O Sashe Chernom i Vladimire Zhabotinskom. Nekrologi-vospominaniya Mikhaila Osorgina [On Sasha Cherniy and Vladimir Jabotinsky. Obituaries-Memoirs by Mikhail Osorgin], in: Mikhail Parkhomovsky / Leonid Yuniverg (eds.), Evrei v kul'ture russkogo zarubezh'ya. Sbornik statey, publikatsii, memuarov i ėsse [Jews in the Culture of Russia Abroad. Collected Articles, Publications, Memoirs, and Essays], vol. 1: 1919–1939 gg. [The Years 1919–1939], Jerusalem 1992, 74–81.

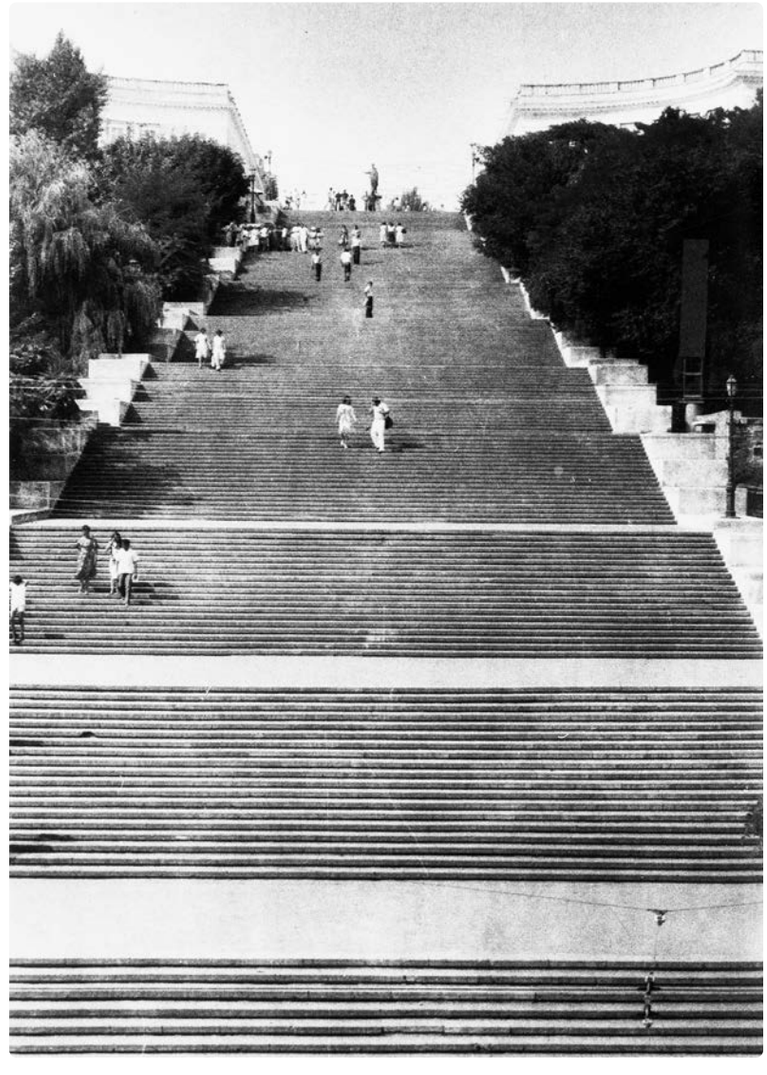

Fig. 3: The Potëmkin steps at the port of Odesa, widely known from the iconic scenes from Sergey Ėyzenshteyn's movie *Bronenosets Potëmkin* (Battleship Potemkin).

Fig. 4: Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky in the midst of soldiers of the Jewish Legion, 1918.

Jabotinsky also worked for the Russian press, specifically *Nasha Zhizn'* (Our Life) and *Rus'* (Ruthenia). In 1904, he founded a Zionist publishing house in Odessa, Kadimah (Forward), while continuing to work with the publisher Vostok (East) in St. Petersburg.

The year 1905 was significant for the writer and divided his perception of his beloved city Odessa and the Jewish question into before and after. After 1905, Odessa—once cosmopolitan and laid-back—was filled with hatred and antisemitism. Jews were accused of instigating workers' strikes and vandalism in the port while the rebellious Russian battleship "Potëmkin" lied at anchor. In 1908, he wrote the play *Chuzhbina* (Foreign Land), based on the so-called Potëmkin Days of 1905 (fig. 3). In it, he criticized Jewish participation in the Russian revolution, which ended with the defeat of the Odessa port and the most devastating pogrom in the Pale of Settlement. The play was highly praised by Maksim Gor'kiy for its vigor and expressiveness.

In the winter of 1908/09, Jabotinsky travelled to Constantinople and Palestine, which was part of the Ottoman Empire at the time, as a journalist for *Rus'*. After his trip, he published a series of articles on *Novaya Turtsiya i nashi perspektivy* (New Turkey and Our Perspectives). His first visit to the Holy Land was also described later in his autobiography *Sipur yamai* (Story of My Life). From 1910 to 1912, Jabotinsky toured the country campaigning for Hebrew to become the only language in Russia's Jewish schools. From 1913 until World War I, he actively contributed to the establishment of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, which, after its opening in 1925, he continued to support.

Following the outbreak of World War I, which he predicted in 1912 in his article *Goroskop* (Horoscope) in *Odesskie Novosti*,[6] Jabotinsky visited Sweden, England, Belgium, and France as a journalist for *Russkie Vedomosti* (Russian News). From day one of the war, he was engaged in the creation of a Jewish Legion in the British Army, which he described in *Slovo o polku. Istoriya evreyskogo legiona po vospominaniyam ego initsiatora* (A Word on the Regiment. The Story of the Jewish Legion as Remembered by Its Initiator), a 1928 Russian-language publication (fig. 4). During the war, Jabotinsky wrote regularly in English and Yiddish to propagate the idea of activist Zionism. After the Russian Revolution, he did not return to Russia but stayed in Palestine, where he contributed in Hebrew to the daily *Haaretz* (The Land of Israel). His imprisonment for his role in the 1920 Palestine riots was described in his memoirs *Krepost' v Akko* (The Citadel of Acre). From 1923 onward, Jabotinsky was chief editor of the revived Jewish weekly *Rassvet* (Dawn), first in Berlin, then in Paris. He died of a heart attack in 1940, at Camp Betar in Hunter, New York.

Jabotinsky's Literary Dialogue with Odessa

Jabotinsky's two Russian-language novels *Samson Nazorey* (Samson the Nazarite, 1927) and *Pyatero* (The Five, 1936) appeared first in *Rassvet* and later in book form. Both books are historical novels which elaborate biblical and mythological themes.[7] The novel *Samson Nazorey* is set in biblical times and contains detailed descriptions of the customs and mores of that period. It served as the basis for Cecil B. DeMille's 1949 film *Samson and Delilah*. The novel *Pyatero* was based on the play *Chuzhbina* and Jabotinsky's early articles and feuilletons. It has been interpreted as

6 Altalena (Vladimir [Ze'ev] Jabotinsky), Goroskop [Horoscope], in: Odesskie Novosti [Odessa News], 1 January 1912, 3; Svetlana Natkovich, The Rise and Downfall of Cassandra. World War I and Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky's Self-Perception, in: Medaon. Magazin für jüdisches Leben in Forschung und Bildung 10 (2016), no. 18, 1–11, <http://www.medaon.de/pdf/medaon_18_Natkovich.pdf> (31 July 2022).

7 Tetyana Yakovleva, Metamorphosen in Odessa. Ovids Figuren im Roman "Pjatero" von Vl. Žabotinskij, in: Katarzyna Adamczak et al. (eds.), Symbolae Slavicae. Zwischenzeiten, Zwischenräume, Zwischenspiele. Ergebnisse des Arbeitstreffens des Jungen Forums Slavistische Literaturwissenschaft 2017 in Hamburg, Berlin et al. 2019, 209–220.

autobiographical due to its parallels to the writer's life and considered a decadent novel of the fin de siècle.[8] In *Pyatero*, Jabotinsky masterfully links mythological figures with the biblical Book of Job, embodied by the Jewish, Russian-speaking Mil'grom family from Odessa. The year 1905 with its violent events is significant for the structure of the novel and its protagonists. The narrator, a close friend of the family, recounts the tragic fates of the Mil'groms' five children, who all die, symbolically or literally. They each choose paths that lead them away from their Jewish origins, whether that be espionage or crime, death or conversion, against the backdrop of nostalgic locations in Odessa.

In the preface to the novel, Jabotinsky quotes the final stanza of his poem *Piazza di Spagna*: "*Ya syn svoey pory. Mne v ney ponyatno dobro i zlo, ya vizhu blesk i tlyu: ya—syn eë, i v ney lyublyu vse pyatna, ves' yad eë lyublyu.*" (I am the child of my time. I understand its good and evil, I see its splendor and decay: I am its child and I love all its blots, all its poison). With this quote, he positions himself in relation not only to the time in which he lived, but also to his beloved city—Odessa. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, Odessa was an alluring place full of life and sensuality and enjoyed the reputation of a multicultural and multilingual commercial hub with a Western European flair. It was known as a free city, albeit without its own traditions, but also without the prohibitions inherent to all other cities of the Pale of Settlement in the Russian Empire. It is not surprising that the southern port city has an important place in other texts by Jabotinsky as well: in the Russian-language feuilletons *Nitstsa la Bella. Odesskaya skazka* (Nizza la Bella. An Odessa Fairy Tale, 1899) in *Odesskiy Listok*, as well as *Akatsiya* (Acacia, 1911) and *Moya stolitsa* (My Capital, 1931) from the anthology *Causeries*, and in the Hebrew autobiography *Sipur yamai*.

Sipur yamai was published in 1936 in Tel Aviv as part of *Golah ve-hitbolelut* (Diaspora and Assimilation), the first volume of Jabotinsky's *Ketuvim nivḥarim* (Selected Writings), and describes his life until just after the outbreak of World War I. The basis for *Sipur yamai* was a series of articles in Yiddish, *Zikhroynes fun maynem a ben-dor* (Memoirs of a Contemporary of Mine, 1932–33), published in the New Yorker daily *Der Morgen Zhurnal* (The Morning Journal) and in the daily newspaper *Haynt* (Today) in Warsaw. In *Sipur yamai*, Jabotinsky mixes fiction with fact, a real biography with a mythological one. It was his attempt to legitimize fiction by depicting it as a model of reality. He portrays Odessa as a place

8 Alice Stone Nakhimovsky, Russian-Jewish Literature and Identity. Jabotinsky, Babel, Grossman, Galich, Roziner, Markish, Baltimore, Md., 1992, 45–69.

whose open and cosmopolitan spirit had a major influence on his own perception of freedom, thus leaving an indelible imprint on his literary and political career.

Jabotinsky wrote in numerous languages, including Russian, German, Yiddish, Hebrew, Italian, French, and English, and in different genres. His oeuvre includes poetry, translation, newspaper articles and feuilletons, literary criticism, drama, short stories, novels, autobiographies, and scenarios. Jabotinsky was influenced by Russian and Jewish culture as well as by European enlightenment ideas, and he combined all these in his works. From 1905 onward, the theme that prevailed in almost all of Jabotinsky's texts was the "Jewish question." But despite attempts to break with assimilation and with the past, by using his Hebrew name (Ze'ev) instead of the Russian one (Vladimir) and resorting to the Yiddish and Hebrew languages more often, Russian would always remain his preferred language and Odessa, albeit it as a product of memory and imagination, his favorite city.

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SVETLANA NATKOVICH

A Rhetoric of Evasion: Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky's *Sipur yamai* (Story of My Life, 1936)

When Shlomo Salzman, friend and publisher of Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky, first approached him in the early 1930s with the idea of an autobiography, Jabotinsky was skeptical: "My biography? Oy … It has a taste of the angel of death."[1] (fig. 1) Three years later, however, with the planning of his collected works in Hebrew ongoing, the prospect of including his life story seemed more appealing: "I proudly walk around: 'finally a published author'—ten volumes, not a small thing. I have started fantasizing about writing an autobiography—god is my witness, one can make a novel of it, but I doubt I will find time for it …"[2] Despite his reservations, Jabotinsky began working on his autobiography in one of the busiest periods of his political life, between 1934 and 1935, during the Arlosoroff affair and preparations for the referendum that would determine the withdrawal of the Revisionist movement from the World Zionist Organization and the foundation of the New Zionist Organization (NZO).

Jabotinsky eventually completed the first part of his autobiography, covering the period from his birth to the outbreak of World War I, in time for the aforementioned collection of 1936 (fig. 2).[3] The second part, from 1914 to the establishment of a Jewish legion within the British Army, was published posthumously, in 1943, by his sister Tamar.[4] It was in fact a rewritten version of the earlier account of Jabotinsky's experiences in the Great War, published in Russian in 1928 under the title *Slovo o polku. Istoriya evreyskogo legiona po vospominaniyam ego initsiatora*

1 Archives of the Jabotinsky Institute in Israel, A1–33/2, Ze'ev Jabotinsky to Shlomo Salzman, 24 July 1930.
2 Archives of the Jabotinsky Institute in Israel, A1–2/23/2, Ze'ev Jabotinsky to Shlomo Salzman, 7 December 1933.
3 Ze'ev Jabotinsky, Sipur yamai [Story of My Life], in: idem, Ketavim nivḥarim [Selected Writings], 3 vols., here vol. 1, Tel Aviv 1936, 17–96.
4 Ze'ev Jabotinsky, Sipur yamai. Ḥelek sheni [Story of My Life. Part Two], in: Ketavim nivḥarim, vol. 2, Jerusalem 1943, 25–74.

In Their Surroundings, 183–195 | doi.org/10.13109/9783666306112.183

Fig. 1: Shlomo Salzman and Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky, 1918.

(A Word on the Regiment. The Story of the Jewish Legion as Remembered by Its Initiator). In the later Hebrew version, Jabotinsky expanded some parts and omitted others. As a result, the second volume of Jabotinsky's collected writings in Hebrew included the original second part of his Hebrew autobiography and Bezalel Elizedek's (Klausner) translation of the Russian original *Slovo o polku*, which meant several chapters appeared twice in the same volume, but in different versions.

Jabotinsky is considered one of the founding fathers of the Zionist movement and a leader of Revisionist Zionism. Parallel to his political engagement, he was a renowned journalist, poet, translator, and novelist. The popularization of the Hebrew language was one of the central objectives of his political program, but the autobiography is his only prose written originally in Hebrew. This text, placed in the context of his entire and predominantly Russian literary oeuvre, reveals the author's conflicting views on Hebrew literature.

One of the reasons for this conflict could be Jabotinsky's late acquaintance with the language. Not having received a traditional Jewish education, he began learning Hebrew relatively late, at the age of twenty-three, after his return from the Sixth Zionist Congress in 1903, when he officially aligned himself with the Zionist movement. Therefore, one could assume that, due to a lack of familiarity with the language, he eschewed using it for literary purposes. However, during his time, Hebrew was not a mother tongue to any author and still, many of them (such as women who lacked traditional religious education in the Hebrew language) became major figures in Hebrew literature. Moreover, Jabotinsky's virtuoso mastery of Hebrew, which is apparent in many of his translations,[5] suggests that

5 For the collection of Jabotinsky's poetic translations into Hebrew, see Ze'ev Jabotinsky, Tirgumim [Translations], Berlin 1923. For an analysis of the contribution of this collection to the development of Hebrew poetry, see Dan Miron, Ha-gavish ha-memaked. Perakim al Ze'ev Jabotinsky ha-mesaper ve-ha-meshorer [The Focalizing Crystal. Chapters on Ze'ev Jabotinsky, the Novelist and Poet], Jerusalem 2011, 76–153.

insufficient knowledge could not have been the reason behind the language choices in his original literature.

Jabotinsky's critical stance on predominant trends in contemporary Hebrew literature may also explain his reluctance to use Hebrew in his writings. When Jabotinsky began working for the editorial board of *Ḥadshot Haaretz* (News of the Land of Israel) in 1919, a newly founded newspaper and earlier incarnation of *Haaretz* (The Land of Israel), he emphasized in one of his critical articles what he saw as a drawback of modern Hebrew literature:

> "We need young people who can ride horses and climb trees and swim in the water and use a fist and rifle, people of healthy imagination and a strong desire that aspires to express itself in the war of life. Dostoevskiy and Knut Hamsun will not guide a generation like this. […] Our original literature [Hebrew literature] […] is not suitable for this national role. It usually has no action, no movement, no events, no dynamic—the life it describes is stagnation and boredom, and the drama develops in the depths of the soul—a drama as tiny as a storm in a glass of water."[6]

Unlike the tradition reigning in Hebrew literature at the time, Jabotinsky was a proponent of the narratives of adventure, of plots based on external actions of strong heroes rather than introspection. In 1919, he hoped his upcoming novel *Samson Nazorey* (Samson the Nazarite), which he planned to write in Hebrew, would introduce a new "action"-based poetics into Hebrew literature, but he eventually switched to writing it in Russian.[7] Therefore, his autobiography presents the sole example of his desired poetics written originally in Hebrew (figs. 3 and 4). Jabotinsky's aversion to psychologization and self-reflection is already apparent in the introduction to the text, where he proclaims:

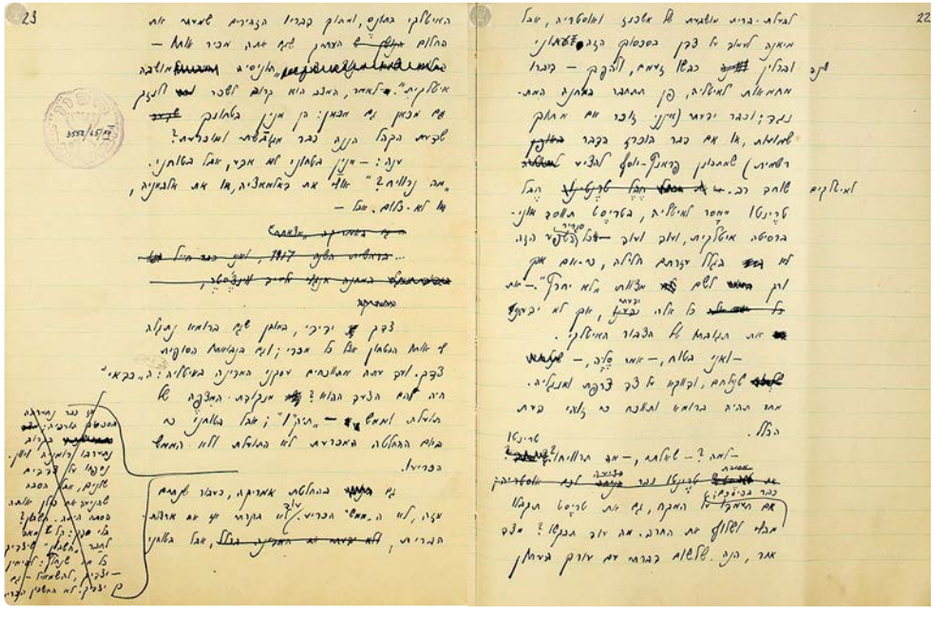
Fig. 2: Title page of Jabotinsky's *Golah ve-hitbolelut*, edited by Salzman.

> "But even with regard to my personal memories I have told [in this autobiography] only one half: the life of the writer and the public figure, not the private life of the man. These two zones are separated in my life by a

6 Ze'ev Jabotinsky, Sienkiewicz, in: Ketavim. Al sifrut ve-omanut [Writings. On Literature and Art], Jerusalem 1958, 164 (originally published in *Hadshot Haaretz*, 8 October 1919).
7 On the history of writing the novel and its linguistic consideration, see Svetlana Natkovich, "Samson," the Hebrew Novel. The History of the Writing and Reception of Jabotinsky's Novel and the Consolidation of the Norms of Realism in Hebrew Literature, in: Jewish Quarterly Review 110 (2020), no. 4, 733–755.

> very high fence; all my life I have refrained as much as possible from allowing them to interfere with one another. […] [E]ven though in my real inner life, this half [private life] outweighs all the other impressions, and my private romance is deeper and richer in deeds and contents than the public one—you will not find it here."[8]

Brian Horowitz contested this statement in his introduction to the English translation of the autobiography, asserting that the text is in fact rich with information on Jabotinsky's private life.[9] Here, however, I want to refer to this passage as reflective of the poetic and ideological intentions of the author, even if he failed to fulfill them completely in the text. Through this proclamation, Jabotinsky detached himself from both the historical tradition of Hebrew autobiography, constructed after the Rousseauian mode of confession,[10] and from contemporaneous autobiographies by emigrants



Figs. 3 and 4: Manuscript pages from Jabotinsky's autobiography.

8 Vladimir Jabotinsky, Story of My Life, ed. by Brian Horowitz and Leonid Katsis, Detroit, Mich., 2016, 33.

9 Brian Horowitz, Introduction. Muse and Muscle. "Story of My Life" and the Invention of Vladimir Jabotinsky, in: Jabotinsky, Story of My Life, 1–31, here 18. Horowitz and Katsis' English edition of the autobiography, excerpts of which are presented here, is based on a translation kept in the Archives of the Jabotinsky Institute in Israel, Tel Aviv. Neither the name of the translator nor the circumstances of translation are known.

10 Alan Mintz, "Banished from Their Father's Table." Loss of Faith and Hebrew Autobiography, Bloomington, Ind., 1989; Marcus Moseley, Being for Myself Alone. Origins of Jewish Autobiography, Stanford, Calif., 2006.

Fig. 5: Zionist Revisionists welcome Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky at the Bucharest train station, 1938.

of the Second and Third Aliyah preoccupied with the connection between individual and collective.[11] Instead of a story of becoming, embedded in its social context, Jabotinsky presented a narrative of revelation and exposure of an already pre-existing self, searching for ways of realization among available opportunities. Society and collective were, in his case, just a scene and an audience for a performance of the self.

Famously referring to the question of relations between individual and collective, Jabotinsky claimed in his autobiography: "In the beginning God created the individual, and every individual is a king equal to everybody else."[12] It is arguable whether Jabotinsky referred to all people he encountered or depicted as kings, but he himself was undoubtfully the monarch of his narration, aiming to portray himself as a predestined Zionist leader even before he became aware of the Zionist ideology (fig. 5). To achieve this aim, he employed several narrative strategies, among these a rhetoric of evasion, ontology of truth, strategy of forgetfulness, and mythologization through exposure of its own devices. Michael Stanislawski and Brian Horowitz have pointed to numerous factual mistakes and embellishments in Jabotinsky's autobiography.[13] But while they explained these through

11 Tamar Hess, Memory's Maternal Embrace. Women, Autobiography, and the Second Aliya, Be'er Sheva 2014, 72 and 79 (Heb.).

12 Jabotinsky, Story of My Life, 59.

13 Michael Stanislawski, Zionism and the Fin de Siècle. Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky, Berkeley, Calif., 2001, 119–121; Horowitz, Introduction, 5.

the lens of Jabotinsky's political needs in the 1930s, I will interpret them in the framework of his aesthetical and historiosophical premises.

The Rhetoric of Evasion

Yosef Ḥayyim Brenner—one of the most representative authors, and a passionate advocate, of the literature of retrospection and self-examination, which Jabotinsky rejected and which dominated the Hebrew literary field in the first third of the twentieth century—introduced an aesthetics and ethics of self-portrayal and representation defined by Menachem Brinker as "rhetoric of sincerity."[14] The claim for truth and the ambition to uncover the truth were an inseparable part of this aesthetics. In his autobiography, however, Jabotinsky proposed his own strategy of self-representation alongside an overall different approach to the question of literature, particularly national literature. Contrary to the rhetoric of sincerity, we may define Jabotinsky's mode of self-presentation as rhetoric of evasion or dodging. Instead of a drive to uncover the truth, to expose wounds, weaknesses, and concealed passions, Jabotinsky's rhetoric throughout the entire text seeks to establish a distance between the authentic self—bigger than life, unknowable and inexpressible—and the limited picture that he is willing to show us. In many places in the text, Jabotinsky emphasizes that he omits the most interesting parts of his life and addresses only things appropriate to his public persona. Thus, for example, in reference to a private trip he took with his friends after attending the Seventh Zionist Congress in 1905, Jabotinsky writes,

> "Oh, how I would enjoy it, and how the reader would have an incomparably better time, if, instead of the autobiography of a public man, I could tell him the story of that excursion, which brought us as far as Venice—without as much as a penny in all our pockets!"[15]

Here, he consciously teases his readers, implying, yet again, that his real life is greater and much more exciting than any literary narrative could convey. Comparing Brenner's with Jabotinsky's rhetoric, we cannot claim that Brenner was more truthful than Jabotinsky. They both were skillful authors fashioning their desired subjectivities according to their ideological and aesthetic perceptions. But each of them created a different contract

14 Menachem Brinker, Ad ha-simtah ha-teveryanit. Ma'amar al sipur ve-maḥshavah be-yiẓirot Brener [To the Tiberian Alley. An Article on History and Thought in Brenner's Works], Tel Aviv 1990, 29–64.

15 Jabotinsky, Story of My Life, 83f.

with his readers. While Brenner sought to position them as partners in the process of construction and interpretation of the characters' reality and personality, Jabotinsky assigned a passive role to the audience as observers and admirers from afar of a larger-than-life persona.

Ontology of Truth

All the abovementioned characteristics of Jabotinsky's autobiography point to a specific ontology of truth that he professed. Jabotinsky was influenced by the relativism of his teacher in the University of Rome, Benedetto Croce, who claimed that "every true history is contemporary history,"[16] suggesting that the real locus of history is positioned not in the past, but in the consciousness of the historian writing it. Similarly, Jabotinsky spoke of the truth in relational terms, as something both evading and dependent on interpretation. There were documents, chronicles, and agreed realities of life, but their true meaning always exceeded dry frameworks of facts and could have been revealed only in the process of subjective interpretation and experience.

This characteristic is apparent from the very beginning of *Sipur yamai*, in which Jabotinsky starts from the ostensible mistakes in his birth certificate and immediately points to a gap between the "dry" official information of apparently "objective" documents and the real Jewish names of his parents (fig. 6):

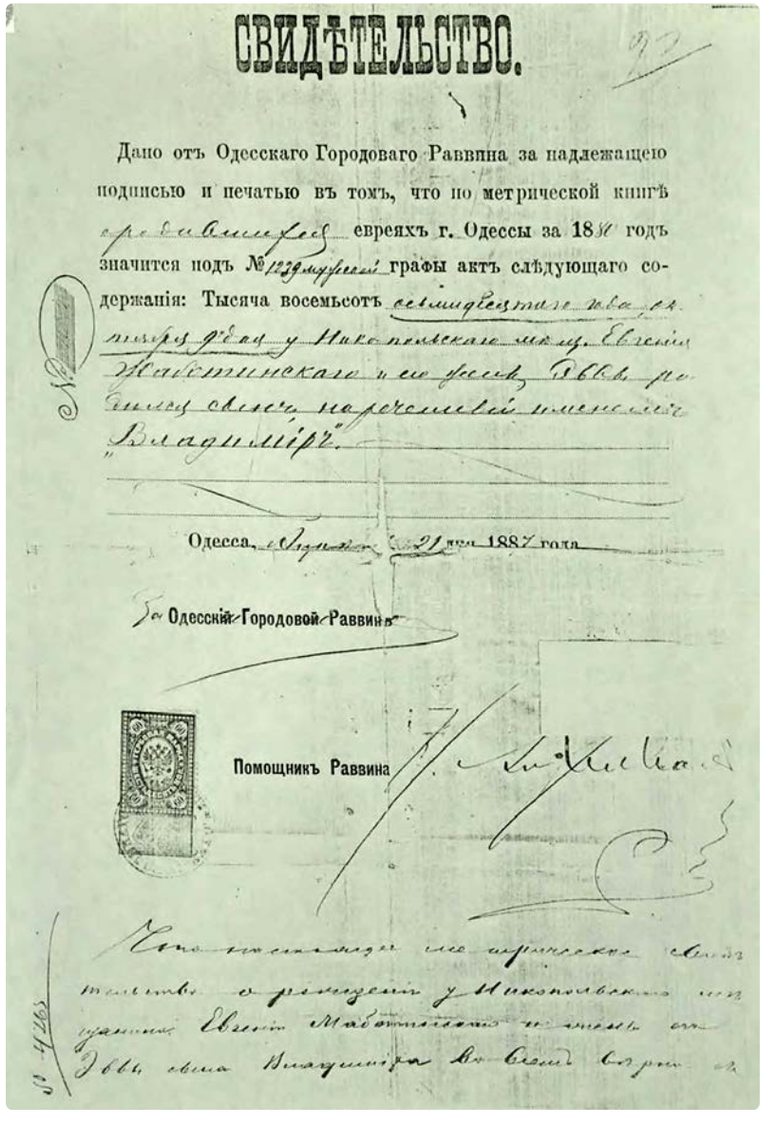
> "במטריקה שלי כתוב: 'ביום ט' לאוקטובר 1880 נולד בן לתושב ('מישצ'נין') הניקוֹפּוֹלי יבגני ז', ואשתו יֶוה, אשר נקרא לו שם ולאַדימיר.' שלוש טעויות: שם אבי יונה בן צבי, אמי חוה בת מאיר, ונולדתי בחמישי לחודש, הוא הי"ח לפי המנין המערבי, ופרשה 'וירא' לפי מנין אמי."[17]

> "My birth certificate says: 'On October 9th 1880, a son was born to the resident *(meshchanin)* of Nikopol Yevgeny Jabotinsky, and his wife, Yeva, and was given the name Vladimir.' Three errors: my father's name is Yona, son of Tzevi; my mother's, Chava, daughter of Meir; and I was born on the fifth of October, corresponding to the eighteenth according to the Western calendar, verse 'Va yar,' according to my mother's system of counting."[18]

16 Benedetto Croce, History. Its Theory and Practice, transl. by Douglas Ainslie, New York 1921, 12; idem, History as the Story of Liberty, transl. by Sylvia Sprigge, New York 1941.

17 Jabotinsky, Sipur yamai, 24.

18 Jabotinsky, Story of My Life, 41.



СВИДѢТЕЛЬСТВО.

Дано отъ Одесскаго Городоваго Раввина за надлежащею подписью и печатью въ томъ, что по метрической книгѣ ... евреевъ г. Одессы за 18[illegible] годъ значится подъ №[illegible] графы актъ слѣдующаго содержанія: Тысяча восемьсотъ ... Одесса, ... 1887 года

За Одесскій Городовой Раввинъ

Помощникъ Раввина

Fig. 6: Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky's birth certificate, 1880.

Jabotinsky sought to emphasize the rift between the factual facade of his parents' Russified identity and their real essence, ungrasped by bureaucracy. But despite his eagerness to proclaim the imprecise nature of the official document, the names stated therein are the names Jabotinsky's parents chose for themselves and which he used his entire life when introducing himself as Vladimir Evgen'evich, and not Yonovich. Although

he, as his parents, lived his entire life captured in the duality of Russian Jewish belonging, in his autobiography, Jabotinsky wanted to rebel against the alloy between Russianness and Jewishness, and present only the Jewish layer as foundational and truly authentic. In the case of the calendar, he points to three different versions, marking a triangle of cultural contexts between which his whole life spreads: the Julian calendar used in pre-revolutionary Russia, the Gregorian calendar, and the Jewish calendar followed by his mother, which enmeshed him from his birth in a Jewish set of meanings.

Strategy of Forgetfulness

A similar idea of intuitive Jewishness, developed prior to the emergence of the consciousness of national belonging, was conveyed by another narrative strategy in Jabotinsky's autobiography, the strategy of forgetfulness. The words "I don't remember" and "I forgot" appear in the text around thirty times. Peculiarly, in most of the cases, they refer to information that can easily be retrieved and restored. But the common characteristic of the forgotten information is that it often concerns the mundane details of everyday life, while the remembered reality represents Jabotinsky as a person predestined for his place in history, who arrived there not following a sequence of concrete circumstances and life decisions, but led by the invisible hand of destiny.

In the chapter *Bein yeled le-elem* (Between Childhood and Youth), Jabotinsky "forgets" some details three times, the first being the name of his Hebrew teacher who prepared him for his bar mitzvah. In general, Jabotinsky creates a distinction between his languages of everyday communication and Hebrew, which apparently was installed in his mind almost unwillingly. He presents the Hebrew as a language that latently waited since his childhood for its hour in his life to come. He seems especially eager to mention his alleged first Hebrew teacher, the venerated editor and journalist Yehoshua Ḥana Rawnitzki. Moreover, he creates a link between his preconscious Zionism, his mother's traditional Judaism, and Rawnitzki's ideological belonging to the Zionist movement:

> "כמובן ידעתי שסוף־סוף תהיה לנו 'מלוכה' וגם אני אסע לגור שמה, הלא זה ידוע גם לאמי, לכל דודותי, לרבניצקי, אבל זו לא היתה 'השקפה' אלא כאלו דרך־הטבע, כגון, רחיצת הידים בבקר ואכילת צלחת המרק בצהרים."[19]

19 Jabotinsky, Sipur yamai, 25.

> "Of course I knew that ultimately we would have a kingdom, and that I too would go to live there—my mother knew that too, as did all my aunts, and Ravnitzky; yet this was not a conviction but so to speak just a natural thing, such as washing one's hands in the morning and eating a bowl of soup at noon."[20]

Rawnitzki is mentioned in this chapter twice, mainly because of his canonical place in Hebrew culture as editor, publicist, and Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik's companion in multiple cultural enterprises.[21] But the less prominent teacher is forgotten because Jabotinsky's knowledge of the Hebrew language is portrayed as a predetermined fact, independent of the concrete circumstances.

The next "forgotten" fact, as well, is connected to his Jewish education. Jabotinsky does not remember whether he had studied Jewish topics in elementary school, yet again signifying the fissure between his conscious indifference to Judaism and unconscious, intuitive belonging to it. The same gap is evident in his reference to the friends of his youth. Although, according to his testimony, there was no nationalist hostility in his surroundings, intuitive attraction brought Jewish youth to socialize with each other, as was the case with children of other ethnic groups. But this conclusion does not fully appreciate the multinational reality of Odessa. Among Jabotinsky's closest friends was Korney Chukovskiy—the illegitimate son of a Jewish father and a Ukrainian Christian mother. Interethnic relationships were an everyday matter in Jabotinsky's circle, which he himself broached in his early prose.[22] But the autobiography was written from his perspective as a national Revisionist leader and his essentialist perceptions of nationalism found their ways into the text and were reiterated in his other reminiscential works of this period.[23]

The third "forgotten" detail in the abovementioned chapter of Jabotinsky's autobiography is the name of his novel which he had sent to the famed Russian-language writer Vladimir Korolenko for feedback. Michael Stanislawski has already addressed Jabotinsky's selective memory on this matter. Fact-checking his claim that the submission of one of his juvenilia to Korolenko had merely been met with the polite advice to "carry on," Stanislawski discovered a letter by Korolenko in which he actually offered

20 Jabotinsky, Story of My Life, 42.
21 For a similar claim, see Horowitz, Introduction, 7.
22 Altalena (Vladimir [Ze'ev] Jabotinsky), Drevle, in: Odesskie Novosti [Odessa News], 10 August 1902, 1f.; Vladimir Jabotinsky, Chuzhbina. Komediya v pyati deystviyakh [Foreign Land. A Comedy in Five Acts], Berlin 1922 (first publ. 1908).
23 Vladimir Jabotinsky, Zikhroynes fun maynem a ben-dor [Memories of a Contemporary of Mine], in: Der Moment, 30 December 1932, 4.

his criticism.[24] Although irrelevant to the narrative of his predestined Zionism, this detail contributes to Jabotinsky's myth of himself as an unfulfilled author, who potentially belonged to the first row of Russian writers. In the same segment, Jabotinsky continues to refer to his juvenile attempts to make it as a struggling author in Odessa. He describes the discovery—by chance—of his first published article. Obviously, this event presupposes writing the article, choosing a newspaper, sending the text to its editors. But this process Jabotinsky chooses to omit, leaving us with the wondrous fact of the publication, almost ex nihilo.

Mythologization through Exposure of Its Own Devices

In the closing paragraphs of the abovementioned chapter, Jabotinsky reveals his own awareness of the mythological character of his persona—he speaks of "legends about my origins,"[25] as if this text aims to dismantle these legends and to present the man behind them in his real proportions. But in Jabotinsky's rhetoric, the awareness of mythologization functions as inseparable part of the process of self-mythologization. Jabotinsky's earlier autobiography *Slovo o polku* contains one of the most striking examples of this move, when he describes the moment of learning that Turkey decided to enter World War I:

> "That morning in Bordeaux, after reading the damp poster on the wall, I drew the only logical conclusion possible—and to this day I don't understand why it took numbers of my friends so many years to reach such a simple conclusion. As I saw it, the matter was crystal clear: the fate of Jews in Russia, Poland, Galicia, very important undoubtedly, was, if viewed in the historical perspective only, something temporary as compared to the revolution in Jewish national life which the dismemberment of Turkey would bring us.
>
> I never doubted that once Turkey entered the war, she would be defeated and sliced to pieces: here again I am at a loss to understand how anyone could ever have had any doubts on this subject. It was no guesswork but a matter of cold statistical calculation. […] Where is the man, whatever his faith, who can honestly point his finger at a certain date and say, 'This is where I saw the light'? Everyone is born with the germ of his belief somewhere inside his brain, though it may not manifest itself until old age, or ever. I believe that it was always clear to me—from birth so to speak—that if ever a war should occur

24 Stanislawski, Zionism and the Fin de Siècle, 116–118.
25 Jabotinsky, Story of My Life, 46.

> between England and Turkey, the right thing for the Jews would be to form a regiment of their own and participate in the conquest of Palestine—although before that day in Bordeaux I had never thought about it distinctly. As a matter of fact, this idea is a very normal idea which would have occurred, under such circumstances, to any normal person; and I claim the title of a fully normal person. In Jewish colloquial parlance this title is sometimes translated by the expression *goyisher kop* [non-Jewish head]; if it is true—so much the worse for us."[26]

Here, similarly to other rhetorical devices of predestination discussed above, Jabotinsky creates a transformation from his self-characterization as an ordinary commentator, a real-life figure, obediently following the line of rational reasoning, to someone who organically carries the "germ" of a national idea and knows things "instinctively," before the consolidation of the historical circumstances which produce them. He simultaneously presents himself as "normal" and unexceptional, and as someone who is more in tune with his inner voice than his short-sighted colleagues. In a way, he paints himself as exceptional in his normality, while denigrating other people's refusal to accept his vision as abnormal and stereotypically Jewish.

The leitmotif of Jabotinsky's autobiography emphasizes the disparity between rational processes and preordained reality and refers to the essential kernel of personal and national destiny, which obviously presupposes a belief that this destiny exists. In the chapter *Between Childhood and Youth*, discussed above, it finds a more explicit expression in the proleptic dialogue with the French politician Anatole de Monzie, with whom Jabotinsky corresponded during the 1920s. Listening to Jabotinsky's failed attempt to explain to him the rationale of the revival of Hebrew, de Monzie concludes that an entire Zionist project is built upon "an aspiration that has no explanation [and therefore] is beyond and above explanation." This kind of neo-idealistic logic appeals to Jabotinsky and his project of self-mythologization.

All above presented devices rely on an anti-rational and nonconformist perception of man, history, and society, developed in the time of Jabotinsky's youth by philosophers such as Benedetto Croce, Henri Bergson, and Georges Sorel. Their system was built on the valorization of intuition, drive, passion, and the unconscious, presenting the rational faculties of the human mind as limited and secondary to the preconscious processes.

26 Vladimir Jabotinsky, The Story of the Jewish Legion, transl. by Samuel Katz, New York 1945, 30 f.

Jabotinsky's autobiography reflected this system of values. On the one hand, he refused to delve into his private realm, envisioning it as too intimate for rational analysis and presentation. On the other hand, he depicted his public deeds and decisions as a product of intuitive drives, embedded in his physical body.

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Dovid Hofshteyn

WERNER NELL

Vessels of Verse on Waves of Destruction: Dovid Hofshteyn

Dedicated to the memory of Hank (Henry) Lobbenberg (1943–2022)

A portrayal of the Yiddish writer, editor, translator, and teacher Dovid Hofshteyn is as multilayered, complicated, and instructive as dealing with the status, impact, and fate of literature in the twentieth century in general. Focusing on one piece of Hofshteyn's art or an episode of his lifetime would not do his biography justice. Throughout his life, Hofshteyn lived and worked in different countries, various social settings and cultural spheres, engaged as an artist, journalist, and teacher (**fig. 1**). His portrait gains in even greater complexity when taking into account the turbulent historical and political framework of a changing world: Hofshteyn witnessed the radical transformations of Tsarist Russia in the wake of a communist revolution and civil war, followed by civic experiments in the Soviet Union of the early 1920s, to be erased by the emergence of a monopolistic party and totalitarian leader. Hofshteyn thus endured a new dictatorship, the brutality of everyday persecution, and mass murder throughout the 1930s and 1940s under Stalin's reign. On the one hand, ambivalence and uncertainty, wars and ideological obsessions framed the situation. On the other, promising cultural developments, such as national and Zionist empowerment, cultural education, and universal emancipation were on the rise, but also contested and corrupted. Ultimately, the entanglement of Hofshteyn's different perspectives—as a writer in the classical sense, an intellectual with a liberal understanding, and an ideological agent (in Gramsci's model: the organic intellectual)—is widely representative for the experiences of life in the first half of the twentieth century.

Dovid Hofshteyn was born on 24 June (Jul.)/6 July (Greg.) 1889 in the Ukrainian town of Korostyshiv near Kyiv. Later he moved to a village in Volhynia. His father, a forester who then started to work as a farmer, was a follower of the Haskalah, a *maskil*. His mother descended from a notable klezmer family. Until the age of nine, Hofshteyn visited a heder, a Jewish elementary school. He was also educated by private teachers and his grandfather in Hebrew and Russian. It was around that time that he began to write poetry, first in Hebrew and later in Russian, Ukrainian, and Yiddish. As a young adult, he worked as a part-time teacher in Kyiv

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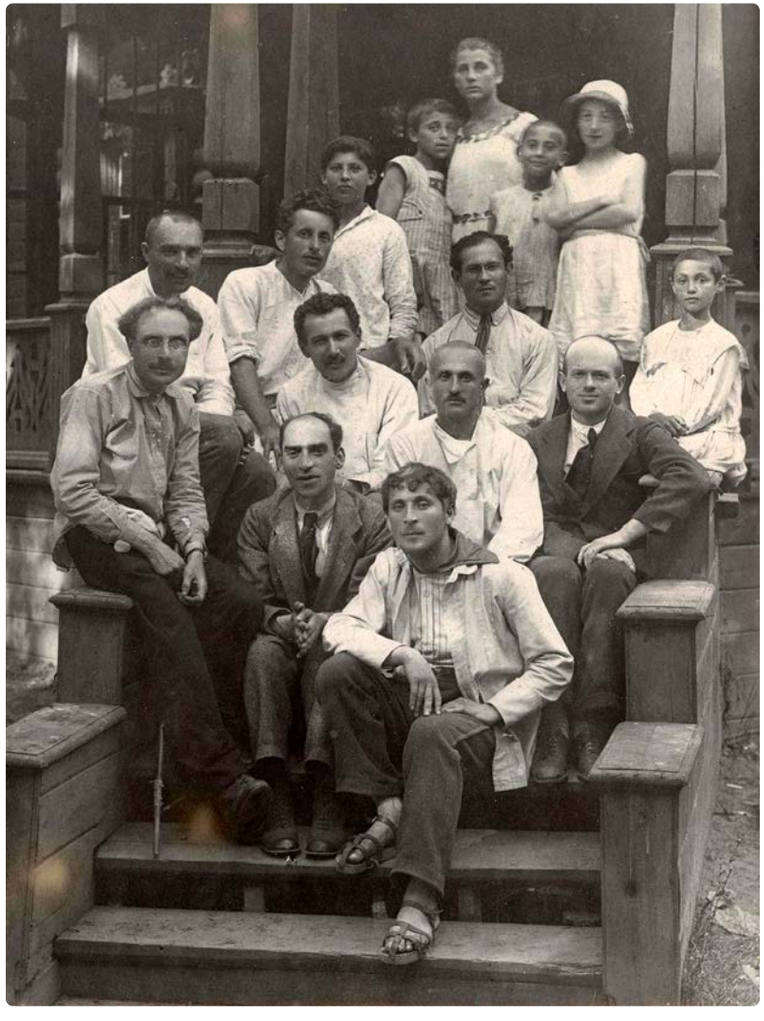

Fig. 1: Writers with children and teachers in a holiday camp in Malakhovka near Moscow, 1921, among them Dovid Hofshteyn, Marc Chagall, and Der Nister.

alongside his studies in commerce and philology. Here, the first works of his Yiddish poetry were printed in several publications, such as the journal *Naye Tsayt* (New Time) and the almanacs *Eygns* (One's Own) and *Oyfgang* (Ascent). He also wrote for children's magazines and translated Russian poetry into Yiddish. Hofshteyn, a supporter of the revolution and an active member of the Kyiv Kultur-Lige (Culture League), became a prominent figure in the realm of Yiddish literature, co-editing *Der Shtrom* (The Stream) and other publications. A variety of his literary works was published and acclaimed in the following years, within Russia, but also

in Berlin, where the journal *Milgroym* (Pomegranate) gave him and other prominent Yiddish writers like Moyshe Kulbak or Dovid Bergelson a platform. In 1922, his book *Troyer* (Grief) was published with illustrations by Marc Chagall. Hofshteyn became known as "the first Yiddish classic"[1] (Moyshe Litvakov). Living in Moscow for most of the time, Hofshteyn worked for theater companies, wrote and arranged Realist plays, founded a publishing house, and also supported younger authors who wrote in Yiddish (**fig. 2**). In 1924, he came into conflict with the Soviet authorities for signing a memorandum supporting Hebrew in the new Soviet state. Subsequently, he had to leave the country, moving to Berlin (1924) and Palestine (1925), where he also engaged in writing, translation, and theater. His poems and other literary works of that time, the majority written in Yiddish but several in Hebrew, found publishers in New York and in Palestine. He continued to translate from Russian into Yiddish. In 1926, he went back to the Soviet Union where he became active in Yiddish proletarian cultural movements. As part of his involvement, he wrote and co-edited *Literatur-kentenish. Poetik* (Knowledge in Literature. Poetics; 1927), *Arbetshul, khrestomatye farn tsveytn lernyor* (Workers' School, Reader for the Second Year; 1928), and *Literatur-kentenish far der arbet-shul* (Literary Knowledge for the Workers' School; 1929), among other books.

Although previously a defender of Leyb Kvitko, who had been severely ostracized since 1929, Hofshteyn became a well-respected representative of Yiddish literature and was even decorated by the state in 1939. In 1940, he joined the Communist Party, striving to incorporate Jewish tradition and language into Soviet politics and culture—and thus supporting action against the rise of Fascism in Europe during these years. To this end, he also became a member of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee two years later. In 1948, he was among those Committee members who were arrested in the course of antisemitic campaigns that proliferated as the establishment of the State of Israel neared. Prior to this, he had written a letter to Golda Meir, one of the leading activists and politicians in early Israel (later to become prime minister, in 1969), lobbying for support of the continuity and development of Jewish life in the Soviet Union. During the era of terror preceding Stalin's death in 1953, on 12 August 1952, Hofshteyn was executed. In 1987, his widow Feyge Hofshteyn established the Dovid Hofshteyn Prize for Yiddish literature in his memory. Over the years, there have been dozens of books and editions and some hundred contributions to papers and journals across the world on Dovid Hofshteyn,

1 Gennady Estraikh, Art. "Hofshtheyn, Dovid," in: The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, ed. by Gershon David Hundert, 2010, <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Hofshteyn_Dovid> (27 June 2022).

Fig. 2: Dovid Hofshteyn and Daniel Tsharni at the entrance of the Joint in Moscow, 1922.

while his poems are read and remembered to this day.

An exploration of Hofshteyn's life and oeuvre within their historical and political framework carries the researcher to the realms, experiences, and challenges of an advancing modernity, in which cultural and aesthetic classifications and attitudes—as reflected in poetry, literary traditions, and, more specifically, in the idea of "classicism"—appear as contested as the concepts of history, individuality, or, ultimately, the promise of a coherent biography themselves (fig. 3). Whereas the nineteenth century had seen the emergence of various ideas expected to transform the world for the better, within Hofshteyn's lifetime, those forces proved to be irrepressible and more far-reaching than anticipated—corrupting or shattering the aspirations toward a more humane future. Coming from the margins, the traditional Jewish world of shtetlekh in Ukraine, Hofshteyn, however, also addressed the struggles and promises of the modern experience: socialism, nationalism, Zionism, cultural autonomy—all of which filled with good intentions but corruptible in the service of terror and persecution.

There exist in Hofshteyn's life and work at least three points of reference, namely arts, political activism, and cultural transformation, which relate not only to different historical agendas but also to conceptual role models. Moreover, these domains of his engagement refer to three different programs of social development and cultural messaging under the

conditions of modernity and its challenges. Each of them appears far-reaching and trying enough to cause someone to struggle, fail, lose his or her path, or even, particularly in Hofshteyn's case, to fall into oblivion.

But these reference points may also be helpful to reconstruct his work. Revolutionary verve and participation in political and educational processes are forming the frame on the one side, experiences of learning in traditional settings and subsequent recourse to classical (Russian) sources and literary forms constitute the other side of someone belonging to an educated elite. Moreover—as a third point—the use, development, and transformation of forms, elements, and themes from this tradition for the benefit of Hebrew and Yiddish literature highlight the singular position of Hofshteyn in his time. Based in Eastern and Central Europe and loyal to the Soviet Union, but likewise drawn to an emerging Israel, Hofshteyn appears to be torn between political ideals and artistic obligations; he thus shares the precarity and fragility of his position as a "progressive classicist" with other contemporary authors and artists such as Paul Valéry, Walter Benjamin, or Julian Tuwim. While all of them attempted to reformulate tradition under the conditions of modernity across borders, Hofshteyn faced the tyranny and persecution of a totalitarian regime to which he eventually lost his life, his writings testifying to his artistic and ethical legacy to our present day.

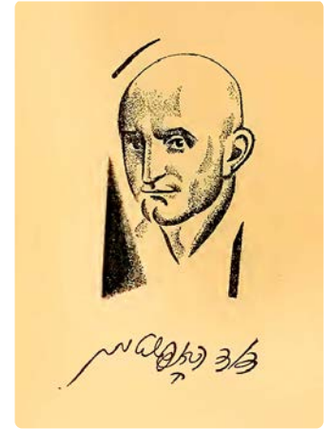

Fig. 3: Bookplate with a portrait and signature of Dovid Hofshteyn in his *Gezamlte verk* (Collected Works), vol. 1, published in Kyiv in 1923.

Hofshteyn's ideas and inspirations, however, may also appear somewhat contradictory: classical literacy versus revolutionary activism; traditional spirituality blended with aspects of a secular political program. Therefore, against the backdrop of assimilationist tendencies in the Soviet Union of the time, his enterprise to promote his literary language of choice, Yiddish, as well as Hebrew appears to be an ultimately modern one in the contexts of national and cultural empowerment.[2] More specifically, in Soviet times, the Yiddish writer undertook the project of bridging and carving out modern experiences: "Hofshteyn successfully adjusted his neoclassical poetics to the formal requirements of socialist realism with minimal compromise in quality."[3]

In the quest to reconcile these three aspects with each other, and to find a place for the uniqueness of the diverse syntheses that characterize Hofshteyn's life and work under the conditions of modernity, a triangle may be

2 For more general information, see David Shneer, Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture, 1918–1930, Cambridge / New York 2004.
3 Estraikh, Art. "Hofshteyn, Dovid."

an apt visualization. Accordingly, and to locate Hofshteyn's oeuvre within the contradictions and controversies of his time, many of which persist to this day, it appears worthwhile to revisit the definition of modernity proposed by Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867) in his famous essay *Le peintre de la vie moderne* (The Painter of Modern Life), first published in 1863: "La modernité, c'est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent" ("modernity is transient, fleeting, contingent")—thus Baudelaire understands the one side of modernity, while the other he deems to be "l'éternel et l'immuable" ("eternal and unchanging"). As Baudelaire is prominently dealing with art here, his definition provides access to Hofshteyn's work by concentrating on the latter's reference to classical forms of literary writing. Hofshteyn turns to the "great" Russian literary tradition, also including references to the programs of liberty and national progress, which had already permeated liberal literature and civil movements in nineteenth-century Russia.

Moreover, for Hofshteyn's sake, Baudelaire's definition may be extended beyond its mere artistic meaning. Hofshteyn's political engagement and concern for the development of the Soviet Union, which may be described as a "revolutionary partisanship," can be subsumed under the first half of the Baudelarian notion of modernity, dealing with fugitive and transitory motions and transformations. On the other hand, Hofshteyn's efforts to promote the Hebrew and Yiddish literatures may be seen as a way of dealing with the "eternal" under the conditions of modernity, as per the second half of Baudelaire's definition. From this perspective, art appears as a way of making the eternal, the experience of "touching eternity," not only real—in the sense that George Steiner alludes to when he discusses art and literature as metaphors for the appearance of a "real presence" within a world of limitations and disturbances[4]—but it arises as a sphere for popularizing the spirit, the self-confidence, and self-awareness of people under pressure, which had been the experience of the Jewish population in Middle and Eastern Europe since the early modern times. Accordingly, Hofshteyn, on the one hand, connects the Yiddish speakers to a literary and cultural tradition, making them visible and letting them "speak," while, on the other hand, he introduces them to genuinely "modern" programs such as literacy and education, which in themselves include aspirations of freedom and redemption. That Hofshteyn took part in writing, representing, and promoting Hebrew has to be seen as a commitment in the same direction: including his work in Palestine in the 1920s and in his taking responsibility for a Jewish, Hebrew-rooted re-orientation of his people. Therefore, he also encouraged and supported

4 See George Steiner, Real Presences (1985), in: idem: No Passion Spent. Essays 1978–1995, New Haven, Conn./London 1996, 20–39.

younger Yiddish writers to take their chances in contributing to the public discourse and opinion as well as to the literary market in the revolutionary Soviet Union.

Against this background of twentieth-century history and the ideological promises of revolutionary movements, Hofshteyn comes into view among those who sought to utilize the promises of equality and justice for the benefit of emancipation and recognition of their own cultural and religious minority. He thus aimed at contributing to the improvement of conditions for society as a whole by advancing cultural literacy and addressing the promises of the classical tradition. As literary texts, especially poetry, are always also representative of the voices and experiences of individuals and groups, mirroring their unique sets of skills, experiences, demands, and obsessions and calling for dignity and respect on their behalf, Hofshteyn represents the "hidden tradition" (Hannah Arendt) of Jewish humanism—not least by continuing a line which, in Michael Walzer's words, extends from the biblical prophets to modern writers and intellectuals.[5] With them, Hofshteyn also shared the fate of disregard, persecution, and/or execution, thus indicating the political and social as well as ideological limitations of promises under the conditions of modernity. His voice, his literary power, and the art of his poetry remain treasured today, testifying to the significance of his advocacy for the rights of society, minorities, and, most notably, of every single person to be his or her own self.

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5 Michael Walzer, Interpretation and Social Criticism, Cambridge, Mass., 1987.

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Werner Nell studied comparative literature, history, and sociology, at the universities in Mainz, Frankfurt, and Dijon. He completed his PhD (1985) and habilitation (1995) at the Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz. From 1980 to 1998, he worked as a journalist and editor, also teaching at the Department of Comparative Literature at Mainz University. From 1998 to 2019, he held the chair for Comparative Literature at the Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg; since 2008, he has been adjunct associate professor at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, Canada. Besides, he is currently working as a researcher at the Institute for Social Pedagogic Research in Mainz. *Selected Publications*: Eskapismus in den Abgrund. Schreiben zwischen Russland und Deutschland, Stalinismus und Faschismus im Jahrhundert der Extreme, in: Carsten Gansel (ed.), Deutschland, Russland. Topographien einer literarischen Beziehungsgeschichte, Berlin 2020, 61–92; Kleinstadtliteratur. Erkundungen eines Imaginationsraums ungleichzeitiger Moderne, Bielefeld 2020 (ed. with Marc Weiland).

SABINE KOLLER

Names Written on the Ruins of Tyranny …: Dovid Hofshteyn and His Translation of Aleksandr Pushkin's *K Chaadaevu* (To Chaadaev, 1938)

"All Moscow was Pushkin-mad today," the *New York Times* titled on 11 February 1937, the centenary of the death of Aleksandr Pushkin.[1] A beacon of the Golden Age of Russian literature, Pushkin had been elevated to the rank of a national cultural hero after his premature death in early January 1837 from wounds sustained in a duel with French-born Georges-Charles d'Anthès, following months of invectives and intrigues. Be it Fëdor Dostoevskiy, Andrey Platonov, or Mikhail Bulgakov, be it Russian modernist poetry by Aleksandr Blok, Anna Akhmatova, or Osip Mandel'shtam, Pushkin has always been a central point of reference. The apotheosis of his person in Socialism reached its peak in 1937: With public readings, theater plays, jubilee editions, and official celebrations, the Soviet regime consolidated the myth of Pushkin as a national poet and socialist hero avant la lettre. All this happened during the darkest period of Stalin's terror regime with its cynical show trials, sweeping arrests, and mass deportations that cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of people.[2]

1 This close reading is part of wider reflections on translation practices into Yiddish in the Soviet Union as outlined in my article ¿Puede una lengua desamparada dar albergue a una traducción? Traducciones de Pushkin al ídish entre literatura mundial y colonización interior [Can a Defenseless Language Give Shelter to a Translation? Pushkin's Translations into Yiddish between World Literature and Internal Colonization], in: Sabine Friedrich / Annette Keilhauer / Laura Welsch (eds.), Escritura y traducción en América Latina. Diálogos críticos con Andrea Pagni [Writing and Translation in Latin America. Critical Dialogues with Andrea Pagni], Madrid / Frankfurt a.M. 2021, 131–158.

2 For a comprehensive survey of this period, see Oleg V. Khlevniuk, 1937-i. Stalin, NKVD i sovetskoe obshchestvo [The Year 1937. Stalin, the NKVD, and Soviet Society], Moscow 1992; Wolfgang Stephan Kissel, Der Kult des toten Dichters und die russische Moderne. Puškin, Blok, Majakovskij, Cologne / Weimar / Vienna 2004; Karl Schlögel, Terror und Traum. Moskau 1937, Munich 2008, esp. 198–217. Pushkin's jubilee was also commemorated in the Yiddish-speaking world: In 1937, in Buenos Aires, Yankev Botoshanski edited a slim volume of Pushkin's poems, translated by Moyshe Konstantinovski.

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1937—Celebrating (Yiddish) Pushkin

The Pushkin anniversary was celebrated in the USSR and abroad, in official and dissident circles alike: from Paris, where, under the hardships of her exile, the leading voice of Russian poetry, Marina Tsvetaeva (1892–1941), created *Moy Pushkin* (My Pushkin), a passionate essay on the Russian literary genius, to Birobidzhan, the territory chosen by Stalin for a Jewish autonomous region, a "socialist Zion" on the far eastern margins of the Soviet Empire with Yiddish as its official language. Tsvetaeva's appraisal is highly poetic, while the Birobidzhan one is prosaic through and through: In the section "Khronik" (Chronicle), the Birobidzhan journal *Forpost* (Outpost), together with news about goldmines and the opening of the hunting season, lists in its 1937 edition 1–3 a considerable number of translations of Pushkin's works into Yiddish.[3] Among the numerous translators we find august names such as Moyshe Khashtshevatski, Ezre Fininberg, Lipe Reznik, Shmuel Halkin, and Dovid Hofshteyn.

Dovid Hofshteyn, born in 1889 in Korostyshiv near Zhitomir (today's Ukraine), was one of the finest Yiddish modernist poets of his time and a leading member of the Kyiv Kultur-Lige (Culture League), which was founded early in 1918 and became the most powerful institution for the promotion of Yiddish language, literature, and culture up to the 1930s. Along with the eminent Yiddish literati Perets Markish, Leyb Kvitko, Der Nister, Dovid Bergelson, and others, he made a significant contribution to the Jewish cultural revival during its burgeoning years of the 1910s and 1920s. His poems of the literary almanacs *Eygns* (One's Own) or *Baginen* (Dawn) and his cycle *Bay vegn* (At the Roads, 1919) were powerful manifestations of his sober and modest poetic style. Hofshteyn tried to adapt to the ideological and literary exigencies of the Socialist regime. Indeed, he became a compliant proponent of Socialist Realism and was a visible part of the canon of Soviet Yiddish literature. Nevertheless, he was a fervent supporter not only of Yiddishism, but also of Hebrew, both in the 1920s and at the end of the 1940s. His socialist literary mask could never fully hide the profoundly religious matrix of his poetic thinking. Hofshteyn, along with his Yiddish-writing peers Markish, Kvitko, Bergelson, Itsik Fefer, and other prominent Soviet Jews, was shot on 12 August 1952, after a secret trial of the leading figures in the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee.

Apart from his poetry, which encompasses classic, modernist, and socialist strands, translations of French, Ukrainian, and Russian literary works into Yiddish are an important part of his oeuvre. His translations comprise modern authors, including the Russian Symbolist author Leonid Andreev or the Ukrainian poet, prose writer, playwright, and thinker Ivan Franko, as well as authors of the socialist period like Oleksandr Korniychuk. More notably, he translated classical, canonical texts, which had been elevated to the rank of "literature of all nations" by the USSR regime, such as by Georgian Shota Rustaveli, Ukrainian Taras Shevchenko, and, of course, Aleksandr Pushkin.[4]

Hofshteyn amply translated Pushkin's prose, drama, and poetry, except for his historical tragedy *Boris Godunov*, which was translated by Lipe Reznik (1890–1944), and his world famous *Evgeniy Onegin*, adapted for Yiddish by Arn-Yitskhok Grodzenski (1891–1941) and Leyb Naydus (1890–1918).[5] On the occasion of the 1937 Pushkin anniversary, Hofshteyn translated Pushkin's *Povesti pokoinogo Ivana Petrovicha Bel'kina* (The Tales of the Late Ivan Petrovich Belkin), hallmarks of Russian prose, and his *Malen'kie tragedii* (Little Tragedies), miniatures of human passion and vice in the tradition of Molière, Shakespeare, or John Wilson (1627–1696) modeled after European high-brow literature and myths.

In 1938, with a print run of 2,350, Dovid Hofshteyn edited *Lirik un epigramen* (Poetry and Epigrams, **figs. 1** and **2**), an anthology published in Kyiv by the Melukhe-Farlag far di Natsyonale Minderheytn in USSR (Government Press for National Minorities in the USSR). To this edition, he contributed a remarkable number of Pushkin's key poems, including *Pesn' o veshchem Olege* (Di lid vegn klugn Oleg/The Song of the Wise Oleg, 1822), *Poėtu* (Dem poet/To the Poet, 1830), or Pushkin's most somber poem as regards the depiction of a despot, *Antshar* (The Upas Tree, 1827). Together with Yoysef Kotlyar, Moyshe Khashtshevatski, Y. Rimenik, and Lipe Reznik he created a "Yiddish Pushkin" as a homage to the great Russian poet. What is particular about Hofshteyn: The poet was highly sensitive to the formal side of translating poetry not only because of the fact that he was a poet himself, but also because of his commitment to literary theory, especially to Russian formalism.[6]

3 Forpost [Outpost] 1–3 (1937), 362 f.

4 On Hofshteyn's translation of Taras Shevchenko, see Amelia M. Glaser, Jewish Alienation through a Ukrainian Looking Glass. Dovid Hofshteyn's Translations of Taras Shevchenko, in: Prooftexts. A Journal of Jewish Literary History 36 (2017), no. 1–2, 83–110.

5 In her dissertation, Sara Miriam Feldman discusses these translations in detail. Idem, Fine Lines. Hebrew and Yiddish Translations of Alexander Pushkin's Verse Novel *Eugene Onegin*, 1899–1937 (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 2014), <https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/107294/feldmans_1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> (27 July 2022).

6 In 1928, together with his colleague Fume (Fayvl) Shames, Hofshteyn edited a theory of literature in the fashion of Russian formalism. Anchored in sociology, the study is sought as an introduction to the analysis of poetry that, though based on a formalist approach, fits into the ideological guidelines of the time. See Cornelia Martyn, Jiddischer Formalismus, in: Eva Lezzi / Dorothea M. Salzer (eds.), Dialog der Disziplinen. Jüdische Studien und Literaturwissenschaft, Berlin 2009, 325–348, esp. 327 f.

Figs. 1 and 2: Cover and first page of *Lirik un epigramen*, an anthology of Aleksandr Pushkin's poems in Yiddish translation published in Kyiv in 1938.

Pushkin, the "sun" of Russian culture (Vladimir Odoevskiy), was of vital importance to Dovid Hofshteyn. He appears in various shapes in his poetry: as theme, thematic echoes, direct quotations, intertextual allusions, epigrams, and translations. Hofshteyn shares Pushkin's predilection for the iambic meter, for clarity and musicality. Pushkin was a role model for him in many respects, as a poet, and as an advocate for reason and freedom.

Literally from Dovid Hofshteyn's poetic awakening until his last lines, Pushkin is present in his oeuvre as text, subtext, intertext, or context. Hofshteyn shares with Pushkin—and his Russian-writing contemporary Osip Mandel'shtam—the preference for spaces (of desire) like the Caucasus or Crimea, and, in general, the South (of the Russian Empire), for love poetry, and philosophical reflection in poetry. Dovid Hofshteyn's last poem before his arrest in September 1948, *Bay mayn fenster* (From My Window), refers on several levels to Pushkin, the poet and man. The piece was written after the foundation of the State of Israel. A mixture of enthusiasm because of a dream coming true and the naive confidence in the "elder brother," the USSR, which voted for a two-state-solution during the UN General Assembly plenary meeting in November 1947 and was the first country to officially recognize Israel, might have pushed Hofshteyn to his open-hearted confession of faith. It became a dangerous proof of nationalism in the antisemitic atmosphere of Stalin's last years.

In his autobiographical *Bay mayn fenster*, the speaker of the poem relates the foundation of the State of Israel to the nineteenth-century Springtime of Nations in Europe. He proudly evokes Byron and Pushkin as

poets of national awakening, fighting for their people and fighting for freedom. The Yiddish poem has an epigraph in Russian taken from Pushkin. Despite its slight alteration, Hofshteyn clearly continues Pushkin's legacy: The vocation of a poet is "to be on a par with the century," to proudly raise his voice against the historical constraints of his times, to withstand dictatorship, and to devote himself to individual freedom.

Tsu Tshaadayevn—Translating Dreams of Friendship and Freedom in(to) Stalin's Times

The anthology *Lirik un epigramen* contains a poem entitled *Tsu Tshaadayevn* (To Chaadaev). The Russian original, *K Chaadaevu*, is Pushkin's confession of faith in friendship, in liberty and freedom (from despotism), and in a—free—homeland. Pushkin wrote it in 1818. Together with two other poems composed in 1821 and 1824, *K Chaadaevu* expresses his gratitude towards his mentor and friend Chaadaev who had saved him, the hot-tempered young poet, from a duel and his probable death. (As a result, Pushkin was banished to the south of Tsarist Russia, to the very regions which would later become the hub of young Yiddish authors like Hofshteyn.)

> К Чаадаеву
>
> Любви, надежды, тихой славы
> Недолго нежил нас обман,
> Исчезли юные забавы,
> Как сон, как утренний туман;
> Но в нас горит еще желанье,
> Под гнетом власти роковой,
> Нетерпеливою душой
> Отчизны внемлем призыванье.
> Мы ждем с томленьем упованья
> Минуты вольности святой,
> Как ждет любовник молодой
> Минуты верного свиданья.
> Пока свободою горим,
> Пока сердца для чести живы,
> Мой друг, отчизне посвятим
> Души прекрасные порывы!
> Товарищ, верь: взойдет она,
> Звезда пленительного счастья,
> Россия вспрянет ото сна,

И на обломках самовластья
Напишут наши имена![7]

To Chaadaev

Not long we basked in the illusion
Of love, of hope, of quiet fame;
Like morning mists, a dream's delusion,
Youth's pastimes vanished as they came.
But still, with strong desires burning,
Beneath oppression's fateful hand,
The summons of the fatherland
We are impatiently discerning;
In hope, in torment, we are turning
Toward freedom, waiting her command—
Thus anguished do young lovers stand
Who wait the promised tryst with yearning.
While freedom kindles us, my friend,
While honor calls us and we hear it,
Come: to our country let us tend
The noble promptings of the spirit.
Comrade, believe: joy's star will leap
Upon our sight, a radiant token;
Russia will rouse from her long sleep;
And where autocracy lies, broken,
Our names shall yet be graven deep.[8]

To Chaadaev

The dream of hope, of love, of glory
Is but briefly wrapped around us,
Like mist in morning's melancholy;
The playfulness of youth has vanished.
Beneath the burden of force and shame
Desire seethes within us still,
We heed the fatherland's name
With burning restlessness.

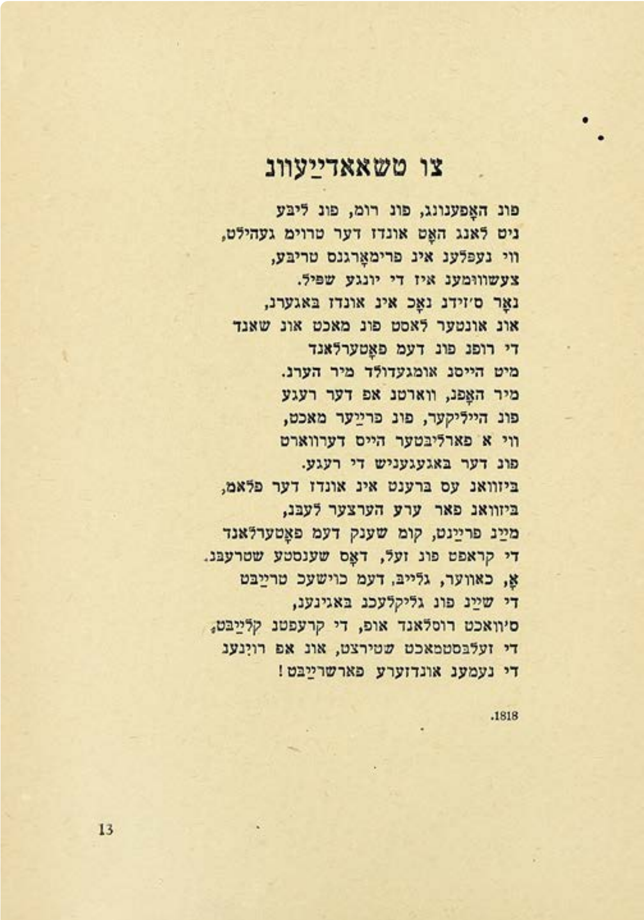
7 Aleksandr Pushkin, K Chaadaevu (1818), <https://ruverses.com/alexander-pushkin/to-chaadaev/4614/> (12 July 2022).
8 Alexander Pushkin, To Chaadayev, transl. from the Russ. by Babette Deutsch, in: idem, The Works of Alexander Pushkin. Lyrics, Narrative Poems, Folk Tales, Plays, Prose, selected and ed., with an introduction by Avrahm Yarmolinsky, New York 1936, 51. Unlike the cited volume, the title "To Chaadaev" is used here throughout for consistency.

We hope; we await the moment
Of a mighty, liberating force,
Like a lover's passion foments
Awaiting the fiery moment of a tryst.
Until the flame inside us burns,
Until our hearts live for honor,
My friend, come send the fatherland
Our spiritual power and holy desire.
O, comrade, have faith! The shine of joyous dawn
Expels darkness, rouses Russia, absorbs our power,
Topples autocracy, and on the ruins,
Inscribes our names.[9]

Pëtr Chaadaev (1794–1856), a famous Russian philosopher and thinker, sharply criticized Russian Tsarism, including Peter the Great, Russian civilization, its backwardness and "historical" void. His orientation toward Catholicism and Freemasonry, his pro-Western and pro-democratic liberal ideals, and his struggle for freedom made him an opponent of Tsar Nicholas I. He became famous for his *Lettres philosophiques* (Philosophical Letters), the first of which was published in 1836. After this letter, which gained tremendous renown, Tsar Nicholas declared Chaadaev mad and prohibited any of his works from being published. The letter, however, was circulating in secret and avidly read by Russian (liberal) intellectuals, among them Pushkin.[10]

K Chaadaevu, a hymn and sanctification of liberty and freedom *(svoboda*, *vol'nost' svyataya)*, expresses the speaker's firm belief in the awakening from a fateful sleep which can be understood as a metaphor for autocratic Russia.[11] After Russia has awoken, it will be a land of freedom and liberty and will immortalize the names of those like Chaadaev and Pushkin who had been fighting for it. The poem excels in its harmonic composition and versification based on Pushkin's famous four-

9 Unpublished translation of Dovid Hofshteyn's *Tsu Tshaadayevn* by Jason B. Wagner.
10 The relationship between Chaadaev and Pushkin is part of Yuriy Lotman's biography of Pushkin. See also David Budgen, Pushkin and Chaadaev. The History of a Friendship, in: Richard Freeborn/Jane Grayson (eds.), Ideology in Russian Literature, New York 1990, 7–46.
11 Pushkin, in his poem, uses both terms of liberty and freedom, *svoboda* (as antonymous to slavery), and *vol'nost'* (as liberty of speech, license; the third term is *volja* [free will]), while Hofshteyn replaces *svoboda*, i.e. the ideologically high-ranked concept of freedom (from slavery), with *flam* (flame). For a detailed study of the semantic impacts of the concept of freedom in the Russian language, see Christoph Schmidt, Freiheit in Russland. Eine begriffshistorische Spurensuche, in: Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas 55 (2007), no. 2, 264–275.


צו טשאאַדײַעוון

פון האָפענונג, פון רום, פון ליבע
ניט לאַנג האָט אונדז דער טרוים געהילט,
ווי נעפּלען אין פרימאָרגנס טריבע,
צעשוווּמען איז די יונגע שפּיל.
נאָר ס׳זידן נאָך אין אונדז באַגערן,
און אונטער לאַסט פון מאַכט און שאַנד
די רופן פון דעם פאָטערלאַנד
מיט הייסן אומגעדולד מיר הערן.
מיר האָפן, וואַרטן אַף דער רעגע
פון הייליקער, פון פרײַער מאַכט,
ווי אַ פאַרליבטער הייס דערוואַרט
פון דער באַגעגעניש די רעגע.
ביזוואַנען עס ברענט אין אונדז דער פלאַם,
ביזוואַנען פאַר ערע הערצער לעבן,
מײַן פרײַנט, קום שענק דעם פאָטערלאַנד
די קראַפט פון זעל, דאָס שענסטע שטרעבן.
אָ, כאַווער, גלייב, דעם כוישעך טרײַבט
די שײַן פון גליקלעכן באַגינען,
ס׳וואַכט רוסלאַנד אויף, די קרעפטן קלײַבט,
די זעלבסטמאַכט שטירצט, און אַף רוינען
די נעמען אונדזערע פאַרשרײַבט!

.1818

13

Fig. 3: The poem *Tsu Tshaadayevn*, translated by Dovid Hofshteyn and published in *Lirik un epigramen* by the Melukhe-Farlag.

footed iambic verse. The complex euphonic structure supports the rhythm of the poem by means of alliterations, assonances, and repetitions and creates subtle internal relations between separated parts of the poem. It is not by chance that, in the whole poem, there are only two words which begin with the initial sound "ra": *Rossiya* (Russia, l. 19) and *rokovoy* (fateful, disastrous, l. 6).[12] Thus, by euphonic means, the empire and the semantic field of doom and destiny are bound together.

Dovid Hofshteyn's translation (fig. 3) is a masterfully rhythmized poem. It keeps the four-footed iambic meter, the enjambments, the crossed rhymes (str. 1, 4, and 5) and the embracing rhymes (str. 2 and 3), as well as the paroxytonic and oxytonic end rhyme (clausula). In order to maintain the meter and rhyme of Pushkin's poem, Hofshteyn slightly changes the syntactic structures, but attentively creates apt equivalences of the dense sound structure. With astonishing elegance, Hofshteyn succeeds in transferring Pushkin's aesthetic and prosodic devices into Yiddish. The result is a classical poem in the Pushkinian sense—and in the sense of Socialist Realism, which at that time favored traditional, hymnic forms. As a result, Hofshteyn perfectly accomplishes a task that he has set himself in the foreword to the 1938 edition of Pushkin's poetry. The task is twofold: The first aim is to "get as close to the original as possible" *(maksimal tsu dernentern zikh tsum original)*. The second task does not focus on the origin, Pushkin's Russian poem, but on the poetic vehicle, the Yiddish language itself.

12 In Russian, an unstressed "o" is pronounced as "a."

For Hofshteyn, translating into his *mame-loshn*, his mother tongue, also meant "preserving the naturalness of Yiddish poetic speech" *("ophitndik dem natirlekhn gang fun der yidisher dikhtung-shprakh")*.[13]

Why was it necessary at all to translate the text beyond the challenges Hofshteyn had mentioned in his foreword? In general, the Soviet Yiddish reader, assimilated by free choice or by oppression, was capable of reading Pushkin's Russian original. What kind of dialogue with the original and with the reader might have pushed Hofshteyn to translate the poem?

Hofshteyn masterfully maintains its form and prosody. He would have been able to do so with the content. However, on the semantic level, Hofshteyn alters the original significantly. This does not happen by chance. A close reading of his translation reveals several semantic shifts compared to the original.[14] They have a noticeable ideological impact and allow the reader to trace hidden layers of meaning. *K Chaadaevu* is part of an intimate and long dialogue between the Yiddish modernist and Pushkin the classic. Hofshteyn's text is not a mere transposition of Pushkin's poem into the language of a "small literature," a "kleine Literatur," as Franz Kafka coined it in his diary, or—in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's reading—a "minor," i. e. "deterritorialized literature."[15] It can be read as a comment on the times in which Hofshteyn was living.

What does Hofshteyn change and why? The Yiddish author does not translate everything literally. Sometimes he chooses words with different meanings. In the last four lines, where the semantic and emotional impact of the poem reaches its peak, he adds new elements to the text. Hofshteyn makes use of Hebrew-based words that significantly change the set of references, connotations, and associations. As we will see, he inscribes into one reading referring to the translated text and author a second possible reading, referring to the translating subject and his time.

How do these semantic shifts change the meaning of the original, how do they add new meanings for an informed Jewish reader? "Informed" should be understood in a double sense: Whether he is in line with the

13 Aleksandr Pushkin, Lirik un epigramen [Poetry and Epigrams], ed. by Dovid Hofshteyn, Kyiv 1938, 3.

14 The term "semantic shift" (smyslovoy sdvig) is used here according to Russian formalist Viktor Shklovskiy. See idem, O teorii prozy [On the Theory of Prose], Moscow 1929, 79. It is part of formalist and structuralist theories by Roman Jakobson or Jan Mukařovský about the aesthetic function.

15 See Franz Kafka, Tagebücher 1910–1923, Frankfurt a.M. 1973, 129–134; Gilles Deleuze / Félix Guattari, Kafka. Pour une littérature mineure [Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature], Paris 1975. Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "minor literature" does not entirely fit with the Yiddish, since one of the characteristics of a "small" or "minor" literature is that it makes use of the language of the dominant culture, i. e. the Jews of Prague writing in German.

Communist Party or not, he is part of the historical, cultural, and ideological development of the radical turmoil of the first decades of the twentieth century in the USSR as a time of hope (the breakdown of Tsarism) and of horror (the civil war, the Great Break, Stalin's totalitarianism, hunger, labor camps). He shares a universal experience and the same cultural and collective memory with other socialist citizens. At the same time, he might be bestowed with the same particular Jewish cultural traditions as the translator, be it on a religious or secular ground, be it the "great narratives" of the Tanach or the Jewish cultural renaissance.

While reading the first lines, one is struck by the perfect transposition of form and content from Russian into Yiddish. It is not until line 6 that the first substitution occurs: Pushkin's key word *rokovoy* (disastrous/fateful) is replaced by *shand* (shame). The phonetic equivalence of *rokovoy* and *Rossiya* disappears, and a new one appears: The noun *shand*, in Hofshteyn's version, rhymes with *foterland* (fatherland, l. 15) and *Rusland* (Russia, l. 19). Thus, the strong feeling of shame and notions of homeland are bound together. If we consider the fact that *shand* is a key term in Hofshteyn's early pogrom cycle *Troyer* (Grief), published in 1922, the word evokes the early Soviet years, the years of (civil) war, pogroms, and death.

Pushkin, while yearning for the moment of sacred liberty to come, speaks twice of a "minute" (l. 10 and 12). Hofshteyn opts for the Hebrew-based *rege* (moment). The noun plays an important role in both Pushkin's and Hofshteyn's poetics: *Rege* is a key word of Hofshteyn's early poetry, encapsulating the moment of poetic inspiration. Pushkin, on his part, expresses the magic of "ingenium" by the same word "moment," in Russian *mgnovenie*. In his famous *Ya pomnyu chudnoe mgnovenie* (I Remember a Magical Moment, 1825), for instance, the apparition of the beloved woman coincides with divine moments of inspiration *(vdokhnovenie)*. Thus, by using "moment" instead of "minute," Hofshteyn stresses the proximity between him and the Romantic genius as well as the poetic ideal of inspiration.

Vol'nost', freedom in the sense of a free will, is an acclaimed (political and individual) ideal of Romanticism. In 1830, when Poland was divided and had disappeared as an autonomous state, Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849) wrote his famous *Oda do wolności* (Ode to Freedom). In 1817, enthusiastic about the ideals of enlightenment in times of despotism, 18-year-old Pushkin created his ode. Hofshteyn replaces Pushkin's rather abstract ideal of holy freedom by the more concrete idea of a sacred "*frayer makht,*" of "free power." Is this choice only due to the fact that the harmonious versification had to be guaranteed by a stressed ending rhyme? Or does the translator allude to the dream of a free and thus sacred power as opposed to Stalin's terror regime?

Pushkin's *K Chaadaevu* ends with an emotional call to believe in the awakening of Russia (l. 17–21). The poet introduces the bright metaphor *"zvezda plenitel'nogo shchast'ya"* (a star of captivating bliss) that will arise (l. 17). Not only does Hofshteyn substitute the star shining at night with dawn and the notion of beginning, since the Yiddish noun *baginen* means both (l. 18). Additionally, he intensifies the power of daybreak by adding its counterpart, complete darkness: *"dem khoyshekh traybt / di shayn fun gliklekhe baginen"* (the brightness of happy daybreaks / expels all darkness, l. 17 f.). Hofshteyn replaces Pushkin's star of happiness with a word directly referring to *Bereshit* 1:4: *Va-yar Elohim et-ha-or ki-tov va-yavdel Elohim beyn ha-or u-veyn ha-ḥoshekh* (And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness; King James Version). In doing so, he omits a key symbol of the Soviet regime.[16] The new image creates a semantic shift from Pushkin's Russia and Hofshteyn's Soviet Union to the creation of the world, to God's realm. *Khoyshekh* appears as a powerful chronotope connecting God's victory of darkness and Stalin's actual dark regime, a "darkness at noon" to use Arthur Koestler's apt title of his 1940 novel *Sonnenfinsternis.* Hofshteyn's "holy beginnings" conjure the mythic light of

Fig. 4: Cover illustration of the first (and last) issue of the Yiddish journal *Baginen*, Kyiv 1919, designed by Yosif Chaikov.

16 The omnipresent symbol of the star was flanked by the preferred metaphors of "sun" and "light" for Stalin himself. Stalin was eulogized as the "sun" by folklore and poets of the Soviet people, Yiddish songs included. See Jan Plamper, The Stalin Cult. A Study in the Alchemy of Power, New Haven, Conn., 2012, 93–95.

Fig. 5: Arkadiy Plastov's *Kolkhoznyy prazdnik* (Kolkhoz Feast, 1937). The monumental painting with Stalin's portrait and the slogan "Living has become better, living has become happier," gained high official acclaim.

God.[17] They evoke, at the same time, the heyday of the Jewish cultural renaissance in the years of the revolution: *Baginen* was its symbol and metaphor, not only in Hofshteyn's poems. *Baginen* was also the title of a Kyiv-based literary journal, an important mouthpiece of Yiddish modernist poetry during the revolution, featuring works by H. Leyvik, Kvitko, and, of course, Hofshteyn (fig. 4).

Pushkin's pathos of hope and his belief in the victory of poetry over despotism is expressed by a triad: the rising star, Russia's awakening, and the final act of the poets' names being written on the ruins of autocracy. With the images of a Russia collecting all its strength (*di kreftn klaybt*, l. 19) and an autocracy crumbling (*di zelbstmakht shtirtst*, l. 20), Hofshteyn stresses the process of collapse. Pushkin's poem from 1818 is based on the opposition of a free Russia, the homeland of the Romantic genius and his friend Chaadaev, and autocratic Russia (under the rule of Alexander I at that time). In 1938, Hofshteyn's translation suggests an additional opposition: the opposition of Russia as a homeland of free thought, of a people that loves liberty and fights for it, like Pushkin, Chaadaev, but also like Hofshteyn and other (Yiddish) authors of his time, and of Stalin's

17 In general, Hofshteyn's Yiddish translation subtly alludes to written and oral religious Jewish traditions: The poet's comparison of yearning for the moment of liberation with a lover's tryst evokes the intimacy of the Song of Songs, the act of inscribing the poets' names echoes Yom Kippur prayers. I would like to thank Jason B. Wagner for drawing my attention to this.

totalitarian regime. Hofshteyn refuses to make use of Pushkin's star of happiness, even though it might have been a most powerful image to establish a positive Soviet myth in the text. At the time, Stalin's slogan "Living has become better, living has become happier" *(Zhit' stalo lutche, zhit' stalo veseley)* infiltrated the collective memory by manifold repetitions and remakes: songs, films, posters, and propaganda art such as Arkadiy Plastov's *Kolkhoznyy prazdnik* (Kolkhoz Feast, 1937; fig. 5), in an exalted Socialist Realism, perpetuated artistically this "terror of happiness."[18] Hofshteyn, for his part, shifts to the glory of a divine beginning in *Bereshit* and in Yiddish literature. Instead of a linear pro-socialist ideologization, the poet opts for its poly-semantic sacralization.

Translating Means Commenting—
Jewish Tradition and Experience under Stalin

1937 was not only the year of Pushkin's jubilee, but also of the celebration of twenty years of the Socialist Revolution. It was the year when, as a result of severe Russification and Sovietization, Yiddish schools and institutions were closed. It was the peak of Stalin's terrible *chistki* (purges) to which also Yiddish authors and literary critics such as Moyshe Kulbak or Maks Erik fell prey. With few exceptions, among them Anna Akhmatova or Boris Pasternak, only those writers and cultural brokers survived who were in conformity with the system, which caused some to betray their literary ideals. Woe to those who did not fit with the ideological scheme.

Undoubtedly, Hofshteyn continued the tradition of Pushkin's heroization as a national poet. At first sight, he translates Pushkin's Russian text quite literally into the Yiddish language. The poem corresponds to the exigencies and needs of the officially constructed Sovietized Pushkin as an opponent of Tsarist (bourgeois) despotism. Yet, a closer look at Hofshteyn's translation reveals that the Yiddish author subverts the Soviet paradigm in two ways: First, Hofshteyn perpetuates Pushkin's poetic power in Yiddish beyond stenciled rhetoric schemes and templates that distort Pushkin's voice.[19] Second, he charges Pushkin's claim for (individual) freedom with Jewish notions that put into question official positions. With

18 See Aleksandr Medvedkin's 1935 film *Schast'e* (Happiness) or *Iskateli schast'ya* (Seekers of Happiness, 1936), directed by Vladimir Korsh-Sablin and Iosif Shapiro, a film about Birobidzhan that starred the famous Jewish actor Benjamin (Veniamin) Zuskin, who was also executed on 12 August 1952.

19 Futurist poet Vladimir Mayakovskiy predicted that uncountable evocations of a personality like Pushkin and an awkward epigonism would kill his vivid image. See his

subtle insinuations by means of Hebrew-rooted words, slight shifts, and additional elements, Hofshteyn proposes a counter-memory to the official state commemoration of Pushkin.[20] He also imposes a temporal transfer from Pushkin's times into Hofshteyn's times and, as a result, alludes to both, Tsarist and Stalinist autocracy. His translation—necessarily a substitution of words of the original language with those from the target language—functions as a continuation of Pushkin's firm belief in freedom.

Dovid Hofshteyn's translation is not only a text aiding the canonization of Pushkin in Yiddish literature. The Yiddish version of *K Chaadaevu* can also be read as a camouflaged commentary in a minority language on an ongoing dictatorship. It is Hofshteyn's secular mode of the Jewish tradition of commenting on a text by means of another text. It is the author's self-enactment as a "Jewish" Pushkin: Just as Pushkin dedicated his poem to Chaadaev and his struggle for freedom, Dovid Hofshteyn dedicated his translation to Pushkin and probably to all those who, also in Yiddish, write in Pushkin's spirit, the spirit of an all-mankind and of the free poetic word. Thus, his translation is an example of spiritual freedom—freedom *as* poetry and freedom *by* poetry.

poem *Yubileynoe* (1924), dedicated to Pushkin in the year when Lenin dies: "Ya lyublyu vas, / no zhivogo, / a ne mumiyu" (I love you, but as a vivid person, not as mummy).

20 See Kissel, Der Kult des toten Dichters und die russische Moderne, 198–217; Jan Assmann, Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen, Munich 1992, 68–70.

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Leah Goldberg

ANNETTE WOLF

Rooted and Uprooted: Leah Goldberg in Europe

> "Through the half-open window, which bore the tremors of the electric light inside the compartment and the shadows of the trees outside it, rose the smell of the Lithuanian forests—a dank, mossy, peaty smell, and the distant fragrance of pine; a smell of damp fallen leaves of red-leaved box trees and the golden oak—and there, very close, the heartbreakingly thin white trunks raced by the train, the trunk of a birch grove in the dark of a starry August night."
>
> Leah Goldberg, *And This Is the Light*

Leah Goldberg's novel *Ve-hu ha-or* (And This Is the Light) begins and ends with a train ride. Twenty-year-old protagonist Nora Krieger is on her way from Berlin, where she is studying archeology, to her hometown Kaunas for summer vacation. The train is not merely connecting two distant places, it also measures the distance and everything that lies between them, revealing to Nora her actual status of being in-between. There are plenty of other constantly recurring motifs in Goldberg's oeuvre that describe this feeling of transit: the "voyaging birds," for instance, suspended between earth and sky, knowing the "heartache of two homelands," or the tree—more precisely the pine—that has its roots in two places at the same time. These images are emblematic for Leah Goldberg, one of the most outstanding figures in twentieth-century Hebrew literature: being rooted and uprooted in the landscapes of European and Hebrew literature. Best known for her poems—she published around seven hundred of them during her lifetime—she was an author of novels, plays, children's books, and essays, an editor, translator, and founder of the Department of Comparative Literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where she was a beloved teacher and served as chairperson for almost twenty years (**fig. 1**). She posthumously received the prestigious Israel Prize in literature. The tension between shaping a new Hebrew Israeli poetics and culture while holding on to a European tradition constituted her literary and intellectual work.[1]

1 I want to thank Natasha Gordinsky for her comments on a first draft of this paper.—A first biography of Goldberg was published by her friend and poet Tuvia Rübner: Leah Goldberg. Monografiyah [Leah Goldberg. A Monography], Tel Aviv 1980. My remarks particularly draw on Yfaat Weiss, Lea Goldberg. Lehrjahre in Deutschland 1930–1933,

In Their Surroundings, 225–233 | doi.org/10.13109/9783666306112.225

Fig. 1: Photograph of Leah Goldberg by David Anderman Eldan, undated.

Goldberg's 1946 novel *Ve-hu ha-or*—one of the first novels published in Hebrew by a woman—is largely set in Eastern Europe. It has been translated into English, but not into German (while her two more or less Berlin-based novels are). Goldberg herself, though very invested in translating European literature into Hebrew and thereby shaping it as a modernist literary language, was scarcely interested in the translation of her own work. Until now, little of her poetic, theoretical, and essayistic oeuvre exists in European languages, raising the question about her place in a European history of literature. This is why, in the following, Goldberg is not so much presented as the Hebrew writer and Israeli icon she is, but as a part of European literature, bearing a strong paradox: While people, places, moods, themes, and topics, especially in her prose, are exceedingly European, they are described in a language that the European audience could barely understand, a language that was almost completely expelled from Europe after the Holocaust.

Leah Goldberg was born in 1911 in Königsberg (now Kaliningrad) but spent most of her childhood in Kaunas, at that time a center of modern Hebrew and Yiddish culture and home to a population that was

transl. from the Heb. by Liliane Meilinger, Göttingen 2010; Allison Schachter, Diasporic Modernisms. Hebrew and Yiddish Literature in the Twentieth Century, New York 2012; Natasha Gordinsky, "Ein elend-schönes Land." Gattung und Gedächtnis in Lea Goldbergs hebräischer Literatur, transl. from the Heb. by Rainer Wenzel, Göttingen 2019.

25 percent Jewish (fig. 2). During World War I, her family was deported to the Russian countryside, along with tens of thousands of other Lithuanian Jews. In 1918, they returned under the most difficult conditions to what was then the capital of independent Lithuania. On their way back, Goldberg's father was arrested and tortured, leading to his lifelong mental breakdown. In *Ve-hu ha-or*, a novel that is often described as semi-autobiographical, the protagonist Nora recalls a scene in which her father is tortured by border guards: "And day after day, for ten straight days, they executed him, as it were. For ten days in a row, that game went on. And the man was broken […]."[2]

Fig. 2: From left to right: Mina Landau, Nadia Maisel, Leah Goldberg, and two other friends in Kaunas, undated.

Goldberg was enrolled in a Hebrew school, where she also learned German, French, Latin, and Lithuanian. Her first encounter with the Hebrew language must have had a profound impact on her: In her diary, which she kept in Hebrew since the age of ten, she expressed the wish to become a Hebrew poet. At a time when modern Hebrew was still developing as a language of modern literature and just started to become a vernacular language in the Yishuv, this was a remarkable decision. While Yiddish was the language of communication at her school, Russian and German pointed toward East and West, toward two geographical centers of her time: Moscow and Berlin. Hebrew, though, had not yet been the language of a specific territory, it pointed to no outer geography but to an inward space of her own.[3]

From 1930 onward, Leah Goldberg studied at the Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin and completed her doctoral studies in 1933 at the Oriental Seminar at the University of Bonn with a work on the Samaritan translation of the Torah (fig. 3). In the 1920s, Berlin was a center not only of Russian and Russian Jewish emigration, but also of Hebrew and Yiddish literature with a dynamic publishing activity. While German-language writers remained mostly indifferent to these émigré authors, for a short moment in time, there was a vibrant encounter between

2 Lea Goldberg, And This Is the Light, transl. by Barbara Harshav, with an introduction and afterword by Nili Scharf Gold, New Milford, Conn., 2011, 16.
3 Weiss, Lea Goldberg, 22–24.

Fig. 3: Professors and students of the Oriental Seminar at the University of Bonn, among them Leah Goldberg (first row, second from the right) and her advisor professor Paul Ernst Kahle next to her (third from the right), undated.

East and West, with Else Lasker-Schüler befriending Yiddish writers in the Romanisches Café in Charlottenburg and Moyshe Kulbak enthusiastically writing in 1920: "I am presently in Berlin. Now I have arrived in 'EUROPE'."[4] But when Goldberg arrived ten years later (fig. 4), the city was already turning into a place full of swastikas. As Yfaat Weiss demonstrates in her book on Leah Goldberg's "years of apprenticeship in Germany," the writer's journey from a marginal, Jewish provincial town to the big city, from East to West, went along with a growing awareness of her own foreignness and alienation as the assigned "other"—an Eastern European Jew in Germany. Goldberg was still living in Bonn, when, in 1933, students alongside members of the National Socialist Party organized the public book burnings all over Germany.

Her encounter with the German and Western European literary tradition should be understood from this particular position of rejection and marginalization, which also found its expression in her unfinished Berlin novel *Avedot. Mukdash le-Antoniah* (Losses. Dedicated to Antonia). Written in the mid-1930s, when Goldberg was twenty-four years old, but published as fragment only posthumously in 2010, it describes the last days of the Weimar Republic through the eyes of its protagonist, the Eastern European Hebrew writer Elchanan Kron (to some extent an alter ego of Goldberg), and focuses on the tension between the growing power of the Nazis and the protagonist's quest of belonging. As a reflection on the ambivalent stance towards Western Europe as "enlightened world," Kron represents a lot of young Jews from Eastern Europe that understood their journey from East to West as "continuation of the spirit of the Haskalah,"[5] but soon were deeply disappointed. Europe was no longer merely Dante, Goethe, Flaubert, and forests of age-old oaks, as Goldberg noted 1945 in her essay *Eiropah shelakhem* (Your Europe). But it was still "the first love despite it all, regardless of the memories flowing in our

4 Cit. in Rachel Seelig, Strangers in Berlin. Modern Jewish Literature between East and West, 1919–1933, Ann Arbor, Mich., 2016, 79.

5 Weiss, Lea Goldberg, 33. The translations from German in the following are my own.

Jewish blood, of slaughter, of burning at the stake, of pogroms […]. Until the day we die we will carry it within us, this immense hurt whose name is Europe."[6] Goldberg went to Palestine in 1935—she never visited Germany again. Her epistolary novel *Mikhtavim mi-nesi'ah medumah* (Letters from an Imaginary Journey), which she wrote shortly after her emigration, can be read as a farewell to Europe. Nevertheless, it still resembles the European modernist style of a *Zitatroman* with numerous references to, and quotations from, Russian, German, and Italian literature.

Fig. 4: Leah Goldberg in her apartment in Berlin, ca. 1935.

When Leah Goldberg arrived in Palestine in 1935, she was a "double immigrant," as Giddon Ticotsky noted with regard to a whole generation that had to bid farewell twice: from the Eastern European world that they knew as children and from the Central and Western European culture they had adopted so quickly (fig. 5).[7] Goldberg's first volume of poems *Taba'ot ashan* (Smoke Rings)—written in Lithuania, Berlin, and Bonn—was published shortly after her arrival in Tel Aviv. In a study on Goldberg's first decade in Palestine, Natasha Gordinsky narrates this highly productive phase in the author's work as a reflection on her personal encounter with Europe. Gordinsky analyzes Goldberg's complex concept of memory and remembrance as shaped by Acmeist theory, the post-Symbolist movement of early twentieth-century Russian poets like Nikolay Gumilëv, Osip Mandel'shtam, or Anna Akhmatova, who believed that the past (the culture or remembrance of the past) has to be always written anew. Inherent in this poetic process is a longing for a world culture, an ongoing

6 As cited in Giddon Ticotsky, "Vera Europa" vs. "Verus Israel." Modern Jews' Encounter with Europe in Light of Lea Goldberg's "Encounter with a Poet," in: Amir Eshel / Rachel Seelig (eds.), The German-Hebrew Dialogue. Studies of Encounter and Exchange, Berlin / Boston, Mass., 2018, 105–120, here 106.

7 Giddon Ticotsky, A German Island in Israel. Lea Goldberg and Tuvia Rübner's Republic of Letters, in: Naharaim. Zeitschrift für deutsch-jüdische Literatur und Kulturgeschichte / Journal of German-Jewish Literature and Cultural History 10 (2016), no. 1, 127–149, here 131.

Fig. 5: Leah Goldberg's press pass, issued in 1936, identifying her as correspondent of the daily newspaper *Davar*.

dialogue with foreign texts.[8] Translation, in the sense of cultural transfer as a poetic procedure, plays an important role in such an understanding of world literature. It was also an essential part of Goldberg's literary work. She translated from seven different languages into Hebrew, for instance, writings of Petrarch, Dante, Charles Baudelaire, William Shakespeare, Rainer Maria Rilke, Anton Chekhov, and Lev Tolstoy. In her theoretical work, she reflects on translation not as imitation, but as a genuine creative process that can also challenge hegemonic structures of a literary canon. As a prominent polylingual "poet-translator," to use Adriana X. Jacobs' term, Goldberg thereby not only showed her intimate knowledge of European literatures, she moreover used translation as an intertextual practice, offering a universal realm to it beyond the construction of national traditions.[9] In this respect, it is interesting to compare Goldberg's idea of world literature to Goethe's, as done by Na'ama Rokem. She points to the former's critique of the Goethean concept of *Weltliteratur* that is defined

8 Gordinsky, "Ein elend-schönes Land," 13.

9 Adriana X. Jacobs, The Go-Betweens. Leah Goldberg, Yehuda Amichai, and the Figure of the Poet-Translator, in: Sandra Bermann / Catherine Porter (eds.), A Companion to Translation Studies, Malden, Mass., 2014, 479–491, here 483.

by a difference between native and foreign, that is rather comparative than general, and by this means, "is posited on the preclusion of the internal difference represented by the Jew, the foreigner who belongs within Europe and speaks Europe's own language."[10]

Over the next decades, Goldberg wrote hundreds of essays and newspaper articles and became an important intellectual voice in the new Israeli Republic of Letters (fig. 6). In 1938, she published her highly acclaimed essay *Ha-omeẓ la-ḥulin* (The Courage for the Mundane), a humanist manifest which offers an approach to Goldberg's literary and theoretical work in general. Written in Hebrew in the Yishuv, it was however conceptualized against the backdrop of her specific historical experience as a student in Germany during the rise of Nazism, as Yfaat Weiss has argued. Combining ethical and aesthetic questions, the essay deals with the purpose of art and science in totalitarian times. When the masses ask for "the great human synthesis" and for the "great personality" as their leader, it is the task of intellectuals to perform "the labor of the mundane," to resist the dissolution of contradictions into a totality. Thus, "the courage for the mundane" can be seen as an emotional, biographical, and poetical mechanism or concept "that expresses the pursuit of synthesis and reflects an experience of inherent non-resolution, of dialectical oscillation as a necessary, constant, and painful condition."[11] In reference to Russian and German Romanticism, *Ha-omeẓ la-ḥulin* can also be read as a plea against the sacralization of everyday life, as Gordinsky has shown. Consistent with Goldberg's anti-Goethean concept of world literature, this amounts to a critique of German classicism, which, with its fixation on the abstract ideal instead of the political reality, had its share in the emerging of barbarism. A critique, by the way, that was after the Holocaust also expressed by other Jewish intellectuals trained in Romantic theory, such as the literary scholar Peter Szondi, who was considered for Goldberg's vacant chair at the Hebrew University when she died.

In *Ve-hu ha-or*, Goldberg presents us anew with this principle of the "courage for the mundane" that refuses to easily resolve the characters' desire and search for belonging. While her epistolary novel and the unfinished Berlin novel *Avedot*, both written earlier, envision a journey from East to West that eventually leads to Erez Israel, this novel implies the route in reverse: Written from Goldberg's new home in Tel Aviv toward

10 Na'ama Rokem, Questioning "*Weltliteratur*." Heinrich Heine, Leah Goldberg, and the Department of Comparative Literature at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, in: Prooftexts. A Journal of Jewish Literary History 36 (2017), no. 1–2, 217–239, here 223f.

11 Anat Weisman, "After All of This, I Will Have to Muster All of My 'Courage for the Mundane'." On Leah Goldberg's Paradigmatic Temperament, in: Prooftexts. A Journal of Jewish Literary History 33 (2013), no. 2, 222–250, here 243f.

Fig. 6: Moyshe Lifshits, Israel Zmora, Lyuba Goldberg, Avraham Shlonsky, Leah Goldberg, and Yocheved Bat-Miriam at the coffeehouse Ararat in Tel Aviv, 1938.

the end of World War II, it evokes the Eastern European city of her childhood. But the text bears a signature of non-simultaneity: What the author writes about does no longer exist, the Jewish city has been annihilated, it is nothing but a place of memory. In this regard, *Ve-hu ha-or* deals with the destroyed Jewish culture of Eastern Europe, "while at the same time trying to preserve in memory the remnants of a humanistic Europe,"[12] which was deemed bankrupt after 1945. Being interwoven with and being torn from Europe, being at once rooted and uprooted—these are the conditions of Goldberg's Europeanness. It is precisely this aporia that makes her oeuvre an essential part of European literature. Until now, even more than eighty-five years after Goldberg was forced to leave the continent, her work preserves the memory of "this immense hurt whose name is Europe."

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12 Gordinsky, "Ein elend-schönes Land," 209.

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SIVAN BESKIN

Visit to Aunt Zlata: Reading a Scene from *Ve-hu ha-or* (And This Is the Light, 1946) by Leah Goldberg

In the summer of 1931, twenty-year-old Nora Krieger, who studies archaeology in Berlin, travels to Kaunas (Kovnah), then capital of Lithuania, to spend the semester break with her family. She stays with her mother Esther and her aunt Lisa, while her father, traumatized by his war experiences and mentally ill, lives separately and is looked after by a Russian family. Although her parents are divorced, the father is still a major source of heartache to Nora and her family; and so is the stigma of mental illness in the family. Early during Nora's vacation, an old friend of her parents, Albert Arin, comes to visit the family for the first time after having left for the United States twenty-five years ago. Nora befriends Arin, who is her father's age, and falls in love with him. After a few days that bring Arin and the family closer together, the man just disappears, all of a sudden, and never comes back. It remains unclear where he went, or what happened to him. After a while, the young woman receives a letter from his worried daughter, who lives in Los Angeles, and learns that Arin, as well, suffers from a mental illness. The novel explores Nora's feelings, thoughts, and doubts about her family, her affection for Arin, her Jewish European identity, her fear of having inherited her father's illness, and her plans for the future, all the way until the end of the holidays. She returns to Berlin, but not without seeing her father first.

This is the basic plot of *Ve-hu ha-or* (And This Is the Light, 1946) by Leah Goldberg (**fig. 1**). The novel can be read as a coming-of-age story, in which the protagonist must make some unusual existential decisions: on her use of language and a country to live in, but, most importantly, on a way to interpret and deal with the mental health issues in her family. Inspired by Goldberg's own family history, fear of mental illness is a central motif of the novel and discussed in the present paper as the decisive factor in a pivotal question, whether to fight an illness or a political system, determining Nora's and her entire generation's future.

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Fig. 1: Leah Goldberg's *Ve-hu ha-or*, published in the Sifriyat po'alim (The Workers' Library) in 1946, with a drawing of the writer by Arieh Navon.

During her time back home, Nora reluctantly visits her other aunt, Zlata, a widow and seriously ill. For Nora, it is a difficult but necessary visit to a woman nearing her end. Aunt Zlata's world is very different not only from that of her cosmopolitan guest, an ambitious young woman who pays for her own studies in Western Europe to become a researcher, possibly in Israel, but also from the world of her mother Esther and aunt Lisa, and their secular Jewish friends in Kaunas. Aunt Zlata, once a modern woman just like them, surrenders in her sickness to the old Jewish ways, which leads to her growing isolation from the rest of the family and society. With disgust, Nora describes her impressions of the building, in which the widow lives:

> "That smell on the stairs! That mixture of smells of dying fish, rot, dust, and rags that hadn't been aired in months; that smell of Jewish corridors, of pale Jewish children, who didn't know soap and water; that stench of unwashed dishes and leftovers of Sabbath dinners, and the choking air of sealed apartments whose windows were shut both summer and winter."[1]

1 Lea Goldberg, And This Is the Light, transl. by Barbara Harshav, with an introduction and afterword by Nili Scharf Gold, New Milford, Conn., 2011, 105.

On her way to Aunt Zlata's apartment, Nora meets two neighbors, a "masculine woman,"[2] who, as the reader finds out later, is among the "unpleasant witches" surrounding Aunt Zlata since her bereavement, as well as her son. Nora rushes past them, depicting them as follows:

> "There was a strange beauty in those eyes, in the coarse red face. An upsetting, misleading beauty that was somehow depressing and shameful. The dead uncle used to call that neighbor by some strange Sholem Aleichem name. 'Chemeritsa'—Nora remembered and lowered her head at the heavy look. And behind her, the woman's voice rang out as she explained to her stupid son the purpose of Nora's visit in that house, 'To visit a sick woman she's going, the sick woman on the second floor!'"[3]

The neighbor's disparaging nickname, *chemeritsa*, comes from a toxic plant (veratrum) that is, indeed, mentioned by Sholem Aleichem in *Motl Peysi dem khazns* (Motl, Peysi the Cantor's Son) as one of the ingredients of the mouse poison that Motl's older brother produces. When the poison business fails, his friend shoves the book with all his business ideas into a fire, and *chemeritsa* is the only word that is still readable amid the flames. But the word is not only a reference to Sholem Aleichem and his shtetl stories, but to the whole world of misery, failure, and toxicity of fire, and the resistance to it. Moreover, there is Nora's perception of Chemeritsa's beauty as "depressing and shameful," and shame is a recurring theme throughout the book. With these connotations in mind, the neighbor's loud exclamation, "To visit a sick woman she's going, the sick woman on the second floor!", appears to hold a dark prophecy. Nora hesitates, as if not in a residential building but a haunted castle full of ghosts, bats, and vampires—Jewish vampires, feeding on the life and energy of anyone under their sway.

Chemeritsa and all the other "miserable creatures who surrounded Aunt Zlata after she was widowed,"[4] combined with the bad smells and the lack of fresh air in the building, create the atmosphere of an old shtetl in Poland or Galicia, with its conservative and rather simple way of life, as often depicted in Jewish literature. It feels, however, out of place in the city of Kaunas of the 1930s. Even Nora's mentally ill father, who lives in a pleasant house with a garden and is well taken care of, fits into the modern world better than Aunt Zlata. Nora is suddenly overcome by the irrational fear that this place is capable of undoing not only her own achievements in life,

2 Goldberg, And This Is the Light, 106.
3 Goldberg, And This Is the Light, 106.
4 Goldberg, And This Is the Light, 107.

but those of her entire community: "At that stench, its force and violence, everything was null and void. Her liberation, her year of escape, her life in a foreign country."[5] At the root of this perceived danger is Aunt Zlata's sickness, which seems like a warning that no matter how free and educated you are, nature may just throw you back to your shameless, ignorant, and filthy origins. A disease is surrender to nature, or to God, and therefore a kind of disconnect from civilization. Nora has a growing awareness of her place in the Jewish world, of the existential decisions she has to make, and of her share of responsibility in advancing that world—and humanity as a whole—as a woman of her generation. In this sense, efforts to find remedies for diseases are part of the same project as the drive to learn from history or to build a better society. It is therefore no coincidence that, right after visiting Aunt Zlata, Nora meets up with her friends, medical student Hannah, philology student Lucy, law student Giltman, and soon-to-be-bride Nehama, to discuss their career choices. Concluding that, "in these days of permanent crisis, all professions are equally impractical,"[6] they realize that the roles they have chosen are thus also equally important in bringing about that huge social change they desire. It is only Nehama, who, with her marriage, appears to have chosen tradition over progress. As if to emphasize this link between the world of humanities and physical health that determines Nora's behavior, she falls ill after this meeting, although not severely, and after her recovery, spends time with a group of medical students, with whom she feels at home.

Nora's own discipline is archaeology, a science that, theoretically, deals with the past, but in this case reflects her desire for a future in the Land of Israel. It is the soil of Israel, so full of history and answers to all her questions, both Jewish and universal, into which she seeks to sink her spade. All halutzim dream of growing their own food in this soil; but Nora Krieger wants to dig into the same soil to grow her own philosophy. Just like Leah Goldberg, her protagonist chooses the Hebrew language as instrument to address the future, a fact that is revealed toward the end of the novel.

There is an obvious link between the Hebrew language, its homeland, and archaeology as a means to build a better future. However, the questions posed by Nora—and by Goldberg—are too complex to find answers in the Zionist discourse (fig. 2), as a return to Aunt Zlata's stuffy apartment demonstrates. In her sickness, Aunt Zlata is a mere caricature of her younger, healthier self, reduced to some of her basic and most annoying characteristics. Nora remembers those obligatory Friday evenings at the aunt's house, a "prison of depressing and stifling family warmth," watching

5 Goldberg, And This Is the Light, 105.
6 Goldberg, And This Is the Light, 106.

Fig. 2: Leah Goldberg in 1946.

"that dumpy, broad, flat woman, taking the pots out of the oven" to serve "gefilte fish [stuffed fish] you had to praise to the sky."[7]

On the one hand, Nora loves her close relatives and has warm feelings for Aunt Zlata. On the other, she perceives family as a prison as long as people like Zlata value the idea and ideal of family more than its individual members. This is reflected in Nora's perception of the old woman's apartment: "No one was in the big dining room. But nonetheless there was something of a sense of crowdedness, as always, as on those Friday evenings in her childhood."[8] What follows is one of the most important dialogues in the novel (fig. 3).

The conversation between Nora and her aunt starts slowly. In the beginning, every exchange of two sentences is followed by a whole paragraph

7 Goldberg, And This Is the Light, 106.
8 Goldberg, And This Is the Light, 107.

Fig. 3: Poster invitation to a celebration of Leah Goldberg's *Ve-hu ha-or* on 15 March 1946.

on Nora's thoughts. She observes "the sick woman. Her round head, flat as a pancake, was attached to awkward shoulders without passing through a neck. That rheumatic poisoning, which the doctors still hadn't determined, poured a heavy black onto her wrinkled skin."[9] She thinks of Aunt Zlata's impending death, a graceless death that is so at odds with the poetic image she has created in her mind as a reaction to her intimate knowledge of "the other boundary of the forces of mind and consciousness of the person—the madness."[10] Nora, a child of World War I and very much aware of the ongoing crisis and developments in Europe, probably knows that a person dying from natural causes at old age and in their own bed is fortunate. Yet, Zlata's fate scares her, which is likely due to her fear of mental illness rather than death itself. It is worth mentioning that mental illness has metaphorically replaced death in the destiny of her father—he becomes ill "instead of" being lethally shot (in the beginning of the novel, Nora performs the opposite replacement, when she lies to her neighbors about her father's death).

As if picking up on Nora's thoughts, Aunt Zlata begins a conversation that slowly gains in intensity and confronts the young woman with her own fears:

9 Goldberg, And This Is the Light, 108.
10 Goldberg, And This Is the Light, 109.

"'מה שלום אבא?' […]
'תודה. טוב יותר.'
החולה הניעה את ראשה:
'לא, לא. אלי תוכלי לדבר בגילוי־לב, הלוא יודעת אני כמוך שאין לו תקנה. טוב יותר! מה הטוב שבכל העניין! לי אין את צריכה לספר דברים כאלה. אבל היודעת את, מוטב שתשמרי היטב על בריאותך שלך.'
'אבל אני … כלומר … אני חשה את עצמי בטוב, בהחלט', אמרה נורה אובדת־עצות ומיד נתחרטה על דבריה.
'כך!' אמרה החולה בלעג, וקולה נעשה בהיר יותר, ומשהו כעין השראה היה בו: 'בטוב! לפי דעתך הנך חשה עצמך בטוב. אמרה לי אמא שפגשת שם בברלין אותו בן־דוד מוורשה. אמרה לי אמך כי חולה־עצבים הוא — כי, איך אתם קוראים לזאת? כלומר, אנחנו, האנשים הפשוטים, היינו אומרים כי דעתו נטרפה עליו. הוא חולה מאוד, מה?'
'כן', אמרה נורה בקול חנוק. 'אבל הוא, אולי הוא הבריא כבר', סיימה מתוך התגוננות נואשת.
'כך את סבורה?' לעגה החולה, 'נערה בגילך, חביבתי, שוב איננה תינוקת. דומה הדבר שמותר לך לדעת ולהכיר את האמת. הנה האיש הזה ממשפחת אביך הוא, ואביך וגם …'"[11]

"'How's Papa?' […]
'Better, thank you.'
The sick woman shook her head.
'No, no. You can talk frankly to me. I know as well as you do that he's incurable. Better! What's better in this matter! You don't have to tell me things like that. But you know, you had better take good care of your own health.'
'But I … that is … I feel fine, really,' said Nora helplessly, and immediately regretted her words.
'So!' said the sick woman mockingly, and her voice became clearer, and something like inspiration was in it. 'Fine! According to you, you feel fine. Mama told me that, in Berlin, you met that cousin from Warsaw. Your mother told me he's got a nervous disease—that, how do you call that? That is, we simple people, we'd say he went crazy. He's very sick, eh?'
'Yes,' said Nora in a choked voice. 'But he, maybe he'll get better,' she concluded with a desperate self-defense.
'You think so?' mocked the sick woman. 'A girl your age, my darling, isn't a baby anymore. You should know and recognize the truth. That man is from your father's family and your father and also …'"[12]

11 Leah Goldberg, Ve-hu ha-or [And This Is the Light], Bnei Brak 2005, 123f.
12 Goldberg, And This Is the Light, 110.

Transforming into a "witch," an evil clairvoyant, Aunt Zlata escalates her rhetoric, predicting Nora's seemingly inevitable fate of mental disorder based on all previous cases in the Krieger family: Nora's father; his brother, who has died in a "lunatic asylum,"[13] as Zlata calls it, albeit of tuberculosis; and that distant cousin from Warsaw. Nora tries to explain her father's illness with war trauma, having been imprisoned, taken to execution, and sent back to his cell repeatedly over the course of many days (the true story of Leah Goldberg's father). But Aunt Zlata refuses to accept this. In her opinion, "if you don't have madness in your blood, you won't have any shock!"[14] Then she becomes more direct in her prophecy: "It's in your blood. In the blood of the whole family. All the Kriegers. I'm telling you this for your own good."[15] This is an attempt of the irrational and oppressive family system of the old world, reawakened by Aunt Zlata's own physical decline, to win back Nora's soul.

It is interesting to note that the two most dominant irrational forces of the old Jewish world, religion and tradition, which are so significant in the literature of male Jewish authors, play no role at all in this novel, not even in Aunt Zlata's reasoning. Goldberg's characters go to the opera, rather than the synagogue, which is typical for the author, who received her education at an excellent Hebrew gymnasium and then a German university, and, unlike most male early-twentieth-century Hebrew writers, had no religious background (fig. 4); the same is true for Nora's family. In fact, the only person seen praying in the novel—"in a loud and silly voice"[16]—is the "stupid son" of Zlata's neighbor. Another character who derives meaning from religion is Tekla, the maid, whose brother comes back from Brazil only to die of tuberculosis in his homeland—a lower-class parallel to the return of Arin. But Tekla is Catholic and illiterate, not Jewish. Aunt Zlata, for her part, speaks of heredity, not in the scientific but in the popular sense, as if to say: You cannot escape family.

The role of mental illness in this story is indeed a fascinating aspect to explore. At one point, Nora quotes a female German doctor, who argues that mental health patients should be shown the same respect as patients with physical conditions—a position that really was ahead of its time. It is evident from the rest of the novel that Aunt Zlata is neither evil nor driven by blind religious zeal; she loves Nora and truly wishes her well. This raises the questions of why, in moments like the above, she says those terrible things. Is it a hint at her earlier rejection of her sister-in-law's (Esther's) marriage to a Krieger? Is it her odd way of alerting Nora to the dangerous

13 Goldberg, And This Is the Light, 111.
14 Goldberg, And This Is the Light, 111.
15 Goldberg, And This Is the Light, 111.
16 Goldberg, And This Is the Light, 112.

Fig. 4: Celebration in honor of Shmuel Yosef Agnon (on Leah Goldberg's right) after his being awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1964 at the Hotel Eden in Jerusalem.

side of her family—the Kriegers' side—and urging her to stick to her mother, who may give her better gifts for life?

A more radical take on this scene is that it constitutes a warning to Nora not to lose herself in the same old irrational world as her sick aunt, but to abandon the outdated concept of family and to love herself and her relatives as the individuals they are. A person like Aunt Zlata would, of course, never express this radical idea directly, but she might send a coded message to her young niece, an epiphany of the last days of her life disguised as a scary story. Indeed, it appears to succeed in strengthening Nora's resolve, even if her final reply remains unspoken: "I won't go crazy!"[17] This interpretation is supported by a later scene, when Aunt Zlata, just before she passes away, speaks her last words to Nora: "Your uncle loved you very much, Nora. This is no place to spend your vacation […]. Your uncle's dead. And so am I […] and you go, go into the fresh air."[18] In her final moments, Aunt Zlata sends Nora a message of true love, a message of freedom and self-determination.

In a sense, this is what happened to the whole old Jewish world, which at some point released the younger generations from its grip to liberate themselves. The paths of liberation were manifold, some more dangerous than others, some robbed of their meaning in the fire of the looming catastro-

17 Goldberg, And This Is the Light, 112.
18 Goldberg, And This Is the Light, 146.

phe—which Goldberg was aware of while working on the novel—some leading to outcomes far worse than any young Jew of the previous century would have dared to imagine. Not even the Land of Israel could ensure true freedom and adherence to humanist principles. No external circumstances can ensure them, or prevent them, for that matter. Ultimately, Aunt Zlata's lesson for Nora is that absolutely nothing can replace personal responsibility and the power of one's own decisions.

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Lea Goldberg, And This Is the Light, transl. by Barbara Harshav, with an introduction and afterword by Nili Scharf Gold, New Milford, Conn., 2011.

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Author

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Yiddish Cultures in Their Surroundings

DARIA VAKHRUSHOVA

The Soviet Yiddish Literati on Culture: Between Modernism and Sovietism

In 1918, the editors of the Russian proletarian magazine *Gorn* (Furnace) prefaced their first issue with an appeal:

> "Рядом с задачами внешнего законодательства, революционного преобразования общественных и правовых учреждений и форм жизни, нам предстоит ещё переродить весь жизненный уклад, затвердевшие в привычной косности способы мышления, чувствования, воображения."

> "Besides our tasks of external legislation, the revolutionary transformation of the social and legal institutions and forms of living, we have yet to transform our entire way of life, the modes of thinking, feeling, imagining that have hardened into habitual narrow-mindedness."[1]

The appeal reflects the fervent hope for a new beginning after the October Revolution, which was meant to bring an overhaul not only of the political and economic systems, but also of culture. The Yiddish-speaking Jewish national minority, like other national minorities now part of the Soviet space, was expected to make their contribution to the new proletarian culture. A quick skim through the Yiddish proletarian press of the time confirms that this expectation was fulfilled. The editors of the youth magazine *Khvalyes* (Waves), for instance, aspired to be leaders in the fight for the new culture (**fig. 1**):

> "דער קאַמף האָט זיך אָנגעהויבן. מוז מען מיט אים אָנפֿירן און אָנפֿירן דאַרף טאַקע די אידישע קאָמוניסטיש־געזאָנענע אַרבעטערשאַפֿט, די פֿעסט־אָרגאַניזירטע און צוזאַמענגעשלאָסענע."

> "Der kamf hot zikh ongehoybn. Muz men mit im onfirn un onfirn darf take di idishe komunistish-gezonene arbetershaft, di fest-organizirte un tsuzamengeshlosene."

1 Gorn [Furnace], in Gorn 1 (1918), 1f., here 1. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the Russian and Yiddish are the author's.

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> "The battle has started. Someone must take the lead in it, and it is the Jewish communist-minded workers who are well-organized and united who must take the lead."[2]

Fig. 1: Cover of the youth journal *Khvalyes*, published in Vitebsk in 1920. Drawing by Solomon Yudovin.

The militant rhetoric employed by Yiddish cultural activists and their insistence on strict organization seem to suggest that they had adopted the communist doctrine. But was this really the case? Or was their rhetoric merely a form of subversive mimicry? What are these texts on the construction of Yiddish proletarian culture really saying, and how are they saying it? An analysis of the pre-1917 concept of modern Yiddish culture developed by non-proletarian activists may help answer these questions. Likewise, a comparison of the role of culture and the basic components of modern Yiddish culture in pre-Soviet and Soviet Yiddish discourse reveals continuities and divergencies, shedding additional light on the subject.

2 Fun redaktsye [Editorial Note], in: Khvalyes [Waves] 1 (1920), no. 1–2, 1 f., here 1.

Yidishe Natsye and *Yidishe Kultur* in Pre-Soviet and Non-Soviet Sources

Yitskhok Leybush Peretz (1852–1915) developed some of the most seminal ideas on Yiddish culture in the Yiddish language itself (fig. 2). In his works, he strove to unite Jewish religious tradition with the inventions of literary modernism; integration and fusion were moreover central to his reflections on culture. In 1911, Peretz published a series of articles titled *Vegn, vos firn op fun yidishkayt* (Paths That Lead Away from *Yidishkayt*), an outright rejection of Hillel Tseytlin's religious nationalism. The philosopher and journalist Tseytlin, who had found his path from Jewish secularism to Hasidism and Kabbalah, rejected the "material" Jewish renaissance (as proposed by Zionism, for instance) and believed instead that a revived Jewish nation should rely on piety and mysticism. Peretz, on the contrary, defined nation in cultural terms:

> "מיט וואָס זענען מיר אויף דער וועלט געקומען? וואָס ווילן מיר? וועלכן קולטור־פֿאָדעם שפּינען מיר אין וועלט־געוועב אַרײַן? וואָס איז אונדזער טאָן אין דער וועלט־האַרמאָניע? וואָס וועט פֿעלן, אַז מיר וועלן פֿעלן?"

> "Mit vos zenen *mir* af der velt gekumen? Vos viln *mir*? Velkhn kultur-fodem shpinen mir in velt-geveb arayn? Vos iz undzer ton in der velt-harmonye? Vos vet feln, az mir veln feln?"
>
> "What do *we* bring into this world with us? What do *we* want? What cultural thread do we weave into the world fabric? What is our tone in the world harmony? What would be missing if we were missing?"[3]

The metaphor of the "thread" reveals Peretz' idea of a universal world culture, which, consisting of autonomous national cultures, is heterogeneous and unified at once. Moreover, Peretz stressed the centrality of culture in the creation of the Jewish nation. Rather than insisting on Jewish political autonomy within Tsarist Russia or an independent territory, he called for an authentic contribution of Jews to world culture.

This double challenge—a national identity and participation in world culture at the same time—had already been part of Peretz' argument three years before, in his essay *Vos felt undzer literatur?* (What Is Missing in Our Literature?), where literature stood for culture in general. According to Peretz, Yiddish literature was lacking a tradition which he found in the Hebrew Bible. Thus far, he followed Hillel Tseytlin. However—

3 Yitskhok Leybush Peretz, Vegn, vos firn op fun yidishkayt [Paths That Lead Away from *Yidishkayt*], in: idem, Ale verk [Collected Works], 11 vols., here vol. 9, New York 1947, 160–200, here 164.

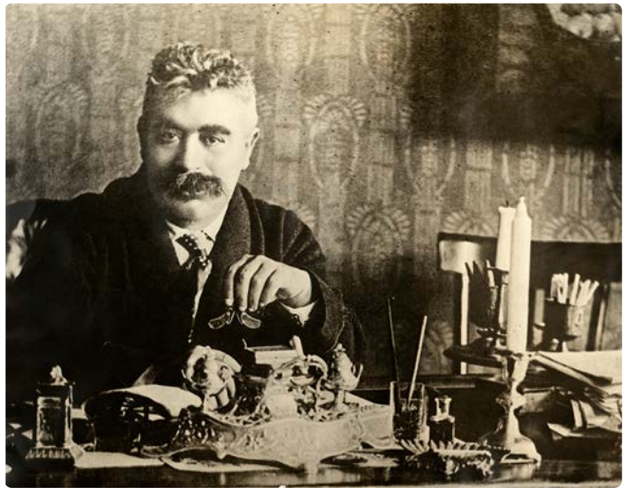


Fig. 2: Yitskhok Leybush Peretz at his desk, undated.

unlike Tseytlin—he defined that tradition not in terms of religious belief but as a link to the past. Peretz believed that cultural development required such a link, which, while being constantly updated, would render modern culture authentic through the constant presence of the past.

Whereas nineteenth-century Europe saw a surge of a nationalism based on the political independence of an ethnic group within sovereign territory, Peretz argued that a Jewish nation would rise when Jewish artists and literati entered world culture and a creative exchange on equal terms with other nations:

> "געטאָ איז אימפּאָטענץ: קולטור־קרייציקונג — די איינציקע מעגלעכקייט פַּאַר דער מענטשלעכער אַנטוויקלונג. זאָל קומען דער מענטש מוז ער זײַן דער סינטעז, דער סך־הכל, די קווינטעסענץ פֿון אַלע נאַציאָנאַלע קולטור־פֿאָרמען און וועלט־אָנשויאונגען."
>
> "Geto iz impotents: kultur-kreytsikung—di eyntsike meglekhkayt far der mentshlekher antviklung. Zol kumen der *mentsh* muz er zayn der sintez, der sakhakl, di kvintesents fun ale natsyonale kultur-formen un velt-onshoyungen."
>
> "Ghetto is impotence: Cultural hybridization is the only way for human development. A *human being* shall come—he will be the synthesis, the sum, the quintessence of all national forms of culture and worldviews."[4]

In 1910, almost at the same time as Peretz wrote *Vegn, vos firn op fun yidishkayt*, the philosopher Khayim Zhitlovski (1865–1943) worked on his introduction to the Yiddish translation of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha* (fig. 3). In this essay, Zhitlovski presented two theoretical models of cultural development. In the first model, he compared world culture to a "garden full of cultures of different nations, each of

4 Yitskhok Leybush Peretz, Vos felt undzer literatur? [What Is Missing in Our Literature?], in: idem, Ale verk, vol. 7, 270–279, here 273.

them expressing the same universal human idea in its own language and form."[5] In this garden, all cultures were equal in their authenticity and significance. The second model was based on hierarchy: Merely a few cultures were considered progressive; the great majority of "backward" cultures, on the other hand, was supposed to first advance to the level of these progressive cultures if they aspired to cultural production in their own right. Grasping cultural development in political terms, Zhitlovski theorized the "conflict of interests" of every nation: national independence versus national distinction. Like Peretz, he linked the concept of nation to that of culture and claimed that an autonomous nation should possess, first and foremost, a "cultural household" of its own. He further tied cultural progress directly to contacts to other cultures:

Fig. 3: Postcard of Khayim Zhitlovski, undated.

> "אין שטענדיקן קאָנטאַקט מיט דעם 'אייראָפּייִשן' שאַפֿן, אין שטענדיקן נעמען פֿון אים און געבן אים, זאָל זיך אַנטוויקלען די יידישע קולטור."
>
> "In shtendikn kontakt mit dem 'eyropeishn' shafn, in shtendikn nemen fun im un gebn im, zol zikh antviklen di yidishe kultur."
>
> "Yiddish/Jewish culture must evolve in constant contact with 'European' creation, in a constant give and take."[6]

Zhitlovski continues to call for close cultural contacts in his later essays *"Eygene" un "fremde" kultur* ("Own" and "Foreign" Culture) and *Di natsyonal-progresive badaytung fun der yidisher literatur* (The National-Progressive Importance of Yiddish Literature):

> "און ווען איך געפֿין דאָס ['וואָס איז גוט פֿאַר דעם מענטשן'], איז יעמאָלט מײַן חובֿה ארײַנצוגיסן עס אין מײַנע אייגענע נאַציאָנאַלע פֿאָרמען, אַזוי, אַז עס זאָל ווערן אַ טייל פֿון מײַן אייגענעם נאַציאָנאַלן זײַן, ניט קוקענדיק דערויף, וואָס דאָס שטאַמט 'פֿון דער פֿרעמד'."
>
> "Un ven ikh gefin dos ['vos iz gut far dem mentshn'], iz yemolt mayn khoyev arayntsugisn es in mayne eygene natsyonale formen, azoy, az es zol vern a teyl fun mayn eygenem natsyonaln zayn, nit kukndik deruf, vos shtamt 'fun der fremd'."

5 Khayim Zhitlovski, Vegn dem vert fun iberzetsungen [On the Value of Translations], in: idem, Ale verk fun Dr. Khayim Zhitlovski [Collected Works by Dr. Khayim Zhitlovski], 4 vols., here vol. 3: Vizye un gedank. Ophandlungen iber shrayber, verk un shafungs-problemen [Vision and Thought. Essays on Writers, Works, and Issues of Creativity], New York 1951, 195–208, here 199.

6 Zhitlovski, Vegn dem vert fun iberzetsungen, 205.

> "And when I have found it ['what is good for humanity'], it is my duty to pour it into my own national forms, so that it should become a part of my own national being, even if it originates in 'foreign lands'."[7]

The writer Peretz and the philosopher Zhitlovski thus both stressed the importance of culture for the specifically Yiddish Jewish nation-building and the necessity of contacts and exchange for the evolvement of Yiddish culture. To both of them, it remained a theoretical concept, something to aspire to; their followers, however, understood it as a self-evident mode of existence. Perets Markish (1895–1952), a modernist poet, a traveler over lands and cultures exposed to various literary traditions, reiterated in his works of the early 1920s the significance of cultural contacts (**fig. 4**). According to him, any culture comprised in itself, beside authentic elements, those adopted from other cultures:

> "דאָס אינערלעכע וועזן פֿון פֿאָלק און פֿון מענטש גיסט זיך צונויף:
> (1) פֿון אייגענע גייסטיקע און אינטעלעקטועלע קוואַלן, וואָס שלאָגן פֿון אים אַליין, פֿון זײַן יעדן אבֿר, פֿון זײַן גאַנצן קאָמפּלעקס און
> (2) פֿון אַזעלכע שטראָמען, וואָס רײַסן זיך אין אים אַרײַן, ווי וואַסערפֿאַלן, פֿון דרויסן, פֿון דער אַרומיקער וועלט, און וואָס אַסימילירן זיך אין זײַנע אייגענע קוואַלן."

> "Dos inerlekhe vezn fun folk un fun mentsh gist zikh tsunoyf:
> (1) fun eygene gaystike un intelektuele kvaln, vos shlogn fun im aleyn, fun zayn yedn eyver, fun zayn gantsn kompleks, un
> (2) fun azelkhe shtromen, vos raysn zikh in im arayn, vi vaserfaln, fun droysn, fun der arumiker velt, un vos asimilirn zikh in zayne eygene kvaln."

> "The inner essence of the folk and of the human is a fusion:
> (1) of their own spiritual and intellectual sources arising from him [the human], from each one of his limbs, from his entirety, and
> (2) of such streams that are like waterfalls, bolting into him from the outside, from the surrounding world, and assimilating in his own sources."[8]

Both the "own" and the "foreign" were thus equally significant, each of them fulfilling its specific functions. It is in the creative human spirit that these streams meet: In this point, Markish was reminiscent of Peretz' statement about man being the "synthesis" and "quintessence" of everything. Markish was convinced that interaction with other cultures, introducing the foreign into the own, was essential to the very existence of culture. The decisive moment was the synthesis of both "streams" which transformed anything hitherto foreign into one's own:

> "דאָס פֿערזענלעכע, דאָס אינדיווידועלע, דאָס מײַנס — פֿון מיר — לאָזט דורך דורך זיך אַלע אײַנפֿלוסן פֿון דרויסן, זאַפּט זיך אָן מיט זיי בעת זייער דורך־גאַנג און לאָזט זיי רעפֿלעקטירן באפֿאַרבטע מיט די קאָלירן פֿון אייגענער פֿערזענלעכקייט."

> "Dos perzenlekhe, dos individuele, dos *mayns*—fun mir—lozt durkh durkh zikh ale aynflusn fun droysn, zapt zikh on mit zey beys zeyer durkh-gang un lozt zey reflektirn bafarbte mit di kolirn fun eygener perzenlekhkayt."

> "The personal, the individual, the *mine*—belonging to me—lets all the external flows pass through it, absorbs them while they are trickling down, and reflects them in the colors of its own individuality."[9]

Isolation as a threat to cultural growth and interaction with the foreign as a driver of cultural evolvement—Markish shared these ideas with Peretz across their differences, the latter being a Yiddish writer of the first generation striving to establish a tradition, the former an Expressionist poet discarding tradition. They likewise shared a predilection for metaphors based on the natural sciences: Markish's central image of a water reservoir with different streams coming together and mixing belongs to the same organic imagery as Peretz' and Zhitlovski's "gardens," "cultural hybridization," and "sparkling springs" of culture.[10]

Fig. 4: Perets Markish, 1921.

Modern cultural studies express this last concept in the succinct formula of plurality. The processes discussed by Peretz, Zhitlovski, Markish, and many others are described by Doris Bachmann-Medick as "hybrid overlaps of multiple cultural affiliations."[11] The Yiddish artists and literati recognized the multilayered dynamic structure of culture as early as during the first decades of the twentieth century. It was an insight forced upon them by their very mode of living: As members of

7 Khayim Zhitlovski, "Eygene" un "fremde" kultur ["Own" and "Foreign" Culture], in: idem, Gezamlte shriftn [Collected Writings], 15 vols., here vol. 8, Warsaw 1932, 153–159, here 159; see also idem, Di natsyonal-progresive badaytung fun der yidisher literature [The National-Progressive Importance of Yiddish Literature], in: idem, Gezamlte shriftn, vol. 11, Warsaw 1931, 213–275, here 229f. and 232.

8 Perets Markish, Di estetik fun kamf in der moderner dikhtung [The Aesthetics of Struggle in Modern Poetry], in: Ringen [Rings] (1922), no. 10, 35–41, here 40.

9 Markish, Di estetik fun kamf in der moderner dikhtung, 40.

10 Perets, Vos felt undzer literatur?, 273; Zhitlovski, Di natsyonal-progresive badaytung fun der yidisher literature, 241f.

11 Doris Bachmann-Medick, Cultural Turns. New Orientations in the Study of Culture, transl. by Adam Blauhut, Berlin/Boston, Mass., 2016, 19.

national minorities surrounded by other languages and cultures, often suppressed both politically and economically, they were always part of the cultural avant-garde. Yiddish as well—a fusion language and particularly apposite example of the hybridization processes present in any language—is characterized by a multilayered structure and polycentricity. Yiddish cultural activists, not possessing yet the modern terminology of today's cultural studies, used the most precise terminology available to them: that of the natural sciences.

From World Culture to World Communist Culture?

At first glance, this insistence on plurality and the ambition to achieve cultural equality with other nations, as expressed in the metaphor "gardens of culture," could not have less in common with the "the social and legal institutions and forms of living" analyzed by the proletarian magazine *Gorn* and discussed in the Soviet Russian and Yiddish press alike. And yet, the assumption that culture was essential to nation-building remained to a large extent unmodified in the early Soviet Union. The importance attributed to literature and culture in the new state was manifest in the amount of articles devoted to these issues. *Der Emes* (The Truth), the official organ of the *Yidsektsye* (Yiddish Section), and *Di Komunistishe Velt* (The Communist World) both included regular literary chronicles, and new magazines were received with enormous enthusiasm, provided they "dealt not only with politics but also with the new Jewish culture."[12] In the absence of an autonomous territory, language remained the only medium maintaining national cohesion. In this respect, the Yiddish communist project did not differ from other Yiddish cultural spaces worldwide. Literature and culture were at least as important as in Peretz' and Zhitlovski's visions.

Their second argument—that culture was a heterogeneous entity evolving in close contact with other cultures while preserving its authenticity—was to be modified in the Soviet Union. True, minority rights were politically secured. Yet, here, the main concern was not a national culture but a common socialist world. The image of culture as an authentic entity whose evolvement depended on constant interaction with other such entities was supplanted by the concept of a common proletarian culture, albeit with national nuances. This development is easily traceable in the shift in rhetorical devices: Imagery borrowed from the natural sciences

12 A lezer [A Reader], Undzere zhurnaln [Our Magazines], in: Di Komunistishe Velt (The Communist World) 1 (June 1919), 21.

gave way to the metaphor of a construction site which, along with images of struggle and paths toward a happy future, belonged to the conceptual metaphors of the Soviet state. Following the revolution and civil war, the people were to build a new world where the Communist state towered like a house in which all nations lived together. In the appeal *Brat'yam-proletariyam vsekh stran* (To Brother Proletarians of All Countries), the editors of the *Proletkul't* magazine *Gorn* adjured proletarians to approach the old culture as construction workers about to erect "a new building." The magazine saluted the laying of the "cornerstone" in the foundation of the "building of the communist culture."[13]

Yiddish writers, too, shifted to the new imagery. The editors of the youth magazine *Khvalyes* declared themselves a "guide [for their readers] in the peaceful construction and the liberation struggle." The Association of Revolutionary Yiddish Writers of Ukraine aimed at participating in "the construction works of the proletariat."[14] In the same year—1927—the group Boy (Construction) was founded, whose declaration abounded with passages on "construction works on the way to socialism" and defined the "historical task" of literature to represent the reorganization and renovation works. The program of the Yiddish magazine *Prolit* of the All-Ukrainian Association of Proletarian Writers, too, was composed in the formulaic language of its time, referring to the "building of socialism" to be erected by the workers.

The image of the construction site overshadowed the impact of modern concepts of cultural diversity or interaction but could not wholly replace them: While contacts to artists and literati in ideologically hostile countries were indeed undesired, the proponents of proletarian culture argued for cooperation with "brotherly" nations. The members of the Association of Revolutionary Yiddish Writers of Ukraine wanted to struggle for the new world side by side with "proletarian writers of all nations in the Soviet Union" and to work in "close cooperation" with the "relevant regional organization of proletarian writers." The fellow traveler literary group Boy saw the need for closer contacts to "revolutionary literary groups of the other languages in the Soviet Union," particularly the "Ukrainian literary

13 Anatoliy Lunacharskiy et al., Brat'yam-proletariyam vsekh stran [To the Brother Proletarians of All Countries], in: Gorn 2 (1920), no. 5, 89–91.

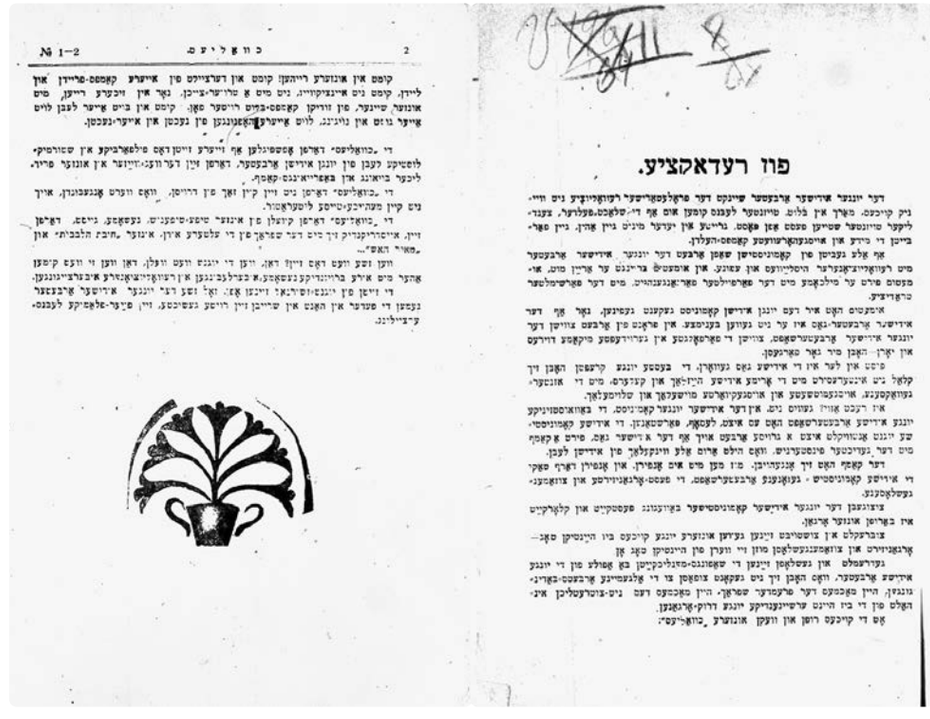
14 The quotations in this and the following paragraph are taken from the programs published in: Deklaratsye fun der "Asotsyatsye fun Revolutsyonere Idishe Shrayber in Ukraine" [Declaration of the "Association of Revolutionary Yiddish Writers of Ukraine"], in: Di Royte Velt [The Red World] 4 (1927), no. 5–6, 138f.; Nokhem Oyslender et al., Deklaratsye fun der literarisher fareynikung "Boy" [Declaration of the Literary Association "Boy"], in: ibid., 139–142; Unzere oyfgabn [Our Tasks], in: Prolit 1 (April 1928), 3–5; Redaktsye [Editors], Tsu ale undzere lezer un fraynt! [To All Our Readers and Friends!], in: Der Shtern [The Star] 2 (1926), no. 4, 68.

community." *Der Shtern* (The Star) devoted a whole newspaper section to translations of Russian and other works. *Prolit* declared it its mission to introduce Yiddish readers to Ukrainian proletarian literature and vice versa. These cooperation efforts indicate the high ambition to establish Yiddish literature as an integral part of a greater literary network. This ambition, however, did not result from the revolutionary turmoil in Russia; it was but a modification of the longing to belong to world literature, which had been present in modern Yiddish culture from its beginning and expressed by both Peretz and Zhitlovski. The ideological shift was signaled with the insertion of one word only: in place of "world literature," they now hoped to be part of "proletarian world literature."[15]

The majority of rhetorical devices employed by Yiddish Soviet magazines were proletarian in origin. Yet, they could not wholly subdue other references—to the traditional Jewish, non-proletarian Russian, the avant-garde, and other cultures. The pages of youth magazine *Khvalyes* were full of biblical references alongside the typical proletarian "battlefields" of the revolution, the "liberation struggle," and "flags, red from the boiling blood of struggle" (figs. 5 and 6). Besides common religious phrases describing the "waste and void" world of the young Yiddish proletarian culture, there were allusions to very specific movements like Chassidism, such as in the metaphor of "revolutionary inspiration," using *hislayves* (Heb. *hitlahavut*), i. e. enthusiasm. The editors compared their new paper to religious scripts like the medieval *Ḥovot ha-levavot* (Duties of the Hearts) by Baḥya ibn Paquda. Their own concession—"putting it in the language of the old Jews"—did not hide the fact that these revolutionaries drew on traditional Jewish imagery. This rhetoric had supposedly just been overcome; in reality, it remained constitutive to their thinking. The prerevolutionary secular Yiddish culture, too, provided reference points for the rising Yiddish proletarianism: A passage on the "little Moyshes and Shloymes" remaining without spiritual nutrition refers to Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik's poem *Unter di grininke beymelekh* (Under the Green Trees, 1901). Finally, a few metaphors belonged to the semantic field common to the proletarian and the modernist aesthetics: The "rotten past and moldy tradition" to be vanquished, according to the *Khvalyes* editors, are reminiscent of the "rotten charm" of the surrounding world condemned by German Expressionist Johannes Molzahn.[16]

15 Deklaratsye fun der "Asotsyatsye fun Revolutsyonere Idishe Shrayber in Ukraine," 138.

16 Johannes Molzahn, Das Manifest des absoluten Expressionismus, in: Der Sturm 10 (1919), no. 6, 90–92, here 90.



Fun redaktsye

Der yunger idisher arbeter shenkt der proletarisher revolutsye nit veynik koykhes, mark un [blut]. Toyznter lebns kumen um af di shlakht-felder, tsendliker toyznter shteyen fest afn post, greyte in yeder minut geyn ahin, geyn farbaytn di mide un oysgehorevete kamfs-heldn.

Af ale gebitn fun komunistishn shafn arbet der yunger idisher arbeter mit revolutsyonerer hislayves un emune un umetum brengt er arayn mut, umetum firt er milkhome mit der farfoylter fargangenhayt, mit der farshimlter traditsye.

Umetum hot ir dem yungn idishn komunist gekent gefinen, nor af der idisher arbeter-gas iz er nit geven benimtse. In front fun arbet tsvishn der yunger idisher arbetershaft, tsvishn di farfolgte un geroydefte mikame doyres un yorn—hobn mir gor fargesn.

Pust un ler iz di idishe gas gevorn. Di beste yunge kreftn hobn zikh klal nit interesirt mit di oreme idishe hayzlekh un kelers, mit di untergevaksene, oysgemutshete un oysgekvarte Moyskhelakh un Shloymelakh.

Figs. 5 and 6: Editorial note in the first issue of *Khvalyes* in 1920. Ornament by Solomon Yudovin.

Iz rekht azoy? Gevis nit. Un der idisher yunger komunist, di bavustzinike yunge idishe arbetershaft hot es itst, lesof, farshtanen. Di idishe komunistishe yugnt antviklt itst a groyse arbet oykh af der idisher gas, firt a kamf mit der gedikhter finsternish, vos hilt arum ale vinkelakh fun idishn leben.
Der kamf hot zikh ongehoybn. Muz men mit im onfirn un onfirn darf take di idishe komunistish-gezonene arbetershaft, di fest-organizirte un tsuzamengeshlosene.
Tsutsugebn der yunger idisher komunistisher bavegung festkayt un klorkayt iz barufn undzer organ.
Tsebreklt un tseshtoybt zaynen geven undzere yunge koykhes biz hayntikn tog—organizirt un tsuzamengeshlosn muzn zey vern fun hayntikn tog on.
Gedremlt un geshlofn zaynen di shafungs-meglekhkaytn ba afile fun di yunge idishe arbeter, vos hobn zikh nit gekont tsupasn tsu di algemeyne arbets-badingungen, heyn makhmes der fremder shprakh, heyn makhmes dem nit-tsutritlekhn inhalt fun di biz haynt ershaynendike yunge druk-organen.
Ot di koykhes rufn un vekn undzere "khvalyes":
Kumt in undzere reyen! Kumt un dertseylt fun ayere kamfs-freydn un leydn, kumt nit eyntsikvayz, nit mit a troyer-tseykhn, nor in zikhere reyen, mit undzer sheyner, fun zudikn kamfs-blut royter fon. Kumt un boyt ayer leben loyt ayer gust un neygung, loyt ayere hofenungen fun nekhtn un eyer-nekhtn.

***

Di *Khvalyes* darfn opshpiglen af zeyere zaytn dos filfarbike un shturmik-lustike lebn fun yungn idishn arbiter, darfn zayn der vegvayzer in undzer fridlekher boyung un bafrayungs-kamf.
Di *Khvalyes* darfn nit zayn keyn zakh fun droysn, vos vert ongebundn, oykh nit keyn meheykhe-teyse literatur.
Di *Khvalyes* darfn kveln fun undzer tife-tifenish, neshome, gayst, darfn zayn, oysdrikndik zikh mit der shprakh fun di eltere idn, undzer *Khoyves halevoyves* un *Meoyr hoeysh* …
Ven zhe vet dos zayn? Dan, ven di yugnt vet veln, dan ven zi vet kumen aher mit ire broyzndike neshome-iberlebungen un revolutsyonere ibertsaygungen.
Di zaytn fun yugnt-zhurnal zaynen ofn. Zol zhe der yunger idisher arbeter nemen di feder in hant un shraybn zayn royte geshikhte, zayn fayer-flamike lebens-ertseylung.

Editorial Note

The young Jewish worker invests not a little energy, sweat, and blood in the proletarian revolution. Thousands of lives end on the battlefields, dozens of thousands stand steadily on guard, ready to go there any minute, to relieve the tired and worn-out battle heroes.
The young Jewish worker works with revolutionary *hislayves* [enthusiasm] and belief in all fields of the communist construction. And he brings courage to everywhere, and he leads a fight everywhere against the rotten past and the moldy tradition.
The young Jewish communist could be found everywhere, except in the Jewish workers' street. The front of the propaganda work among the young Jewish workers, among those who had been pursued and persecuted for years and generations—this front was completely neglected by us.
The Jewish street has become waste and void. The best of the Jewish youth were not in the least interested in the wretched Jewish houses and cellars, nor in the exhausted and emaciated little Shloymes and Moyshes growing up.
Is it fair? Surely not. And the young Jewish communist, the responsible young Jewish laborer has now finally understood it. The Jewish communist youth is now developing a great work in the Jewish street, leading the fight against the dense obscurity that had taken over all corners of Jewish life.
The battle has started. Someone must take the lead in it, and it is the Jewish communist-minded workers who are well-organized and united who must take the lead.
Our publication aims at granting firmness and clarity to the young Jewish communist movement.
Until now, our young forces were unstable and scattered—from now on, they are to be organized and united.
The creative abilities of most young Jewish workers were dozing and sleeping, they could not adapt themselves to the general working conditions—both because of the language, which remained foreign, and because of the inapprehensible contents of the new publications issued to this day.
The *Waves* speak to these forces and awaken them:
Join our rows! Come and tell us about the joy and suffering of struggling, do not come alone, with a mark of sadness, but do come in firm rows, with our beautiful flag, red from the boiling blood of struggle. Come and build your life as to your taste and inclinations, as to your hopes of yesterday and the day before yesterday.

***

> The pages of the *Waves* must reflect the colorful and stormy, the rousing life of the young Jewish worker, must be the guide in our peaceful construction and liberation struggle.
> The *Waves* will not be an alien phenomenon to be artificially integrated, nor an example of casual literature.
> The *Waves* must feed on our deepest of sources, our soul, our spirit, it must be—in the language of the old Jews—the *Ḥovot ha-levavot* and *Meor ha-esh*.[17]
> When will it finally be so? When the youth will want it, when they will come with their stirring experiences and revolutionary convictions.
> The pages of the youth magazine are open. May the young Jewish worker take the pen and write his red story, his flaming life story.

The wording of Yiddish programs and declarations indicate that their authors preserved the writing technique essential to Yiddish literature—the characteristic fusion of the various pieces belonging to the traditions they were conversant with, even if they had to replace some of its elements. This continuity rested, among others, on the fact that the same persons were active in different places, like Moyshe Litvakov, a yeshiva student and Sorbonne-graduate coming to Communist Moscow after a stay in Kyiv, where he participated in the non-partial Kultur-Lige. While now remembered as one of the most adamant Soviet Yiddish functionaries, during his time in the Kultur-Lige, in 1919, Litvakov pleaded for an openness of Yiddish culture to the achievements of other cultures and strove for exchange on equal terms: Besides the integration of world literature in Yiddish literature, he demanded the "naturalization of Yiddish literature in world literature."[18]

After the October Revolution, the programs of Yiddish publications in Russia relied on the tension between proclaimed aims and actual textual means. At first sight, the Yiddish literati committed themselves to cultural Sovietism: They declared the construction of a new culture from scratch and only endorsed cooperation with ideologically like-minded partners. In reality, however, they referred both to the prerevolutionary culture and contemporary non-proletarian art movements like Cubism, Futurism, or

17 *Ḥovot ha-levavot* (Duties of the Hearts)—a homiletic work by Rabbi Baḥya Ibn Pakuda (eleventh century); *Me'ore ha-esh* (Glory of the Fire)—a commentary on the Pentateuch and the Scrolls by Meir Eisenstadt (1670–1744), originally titled *Kotnot or* (Garments of Skin), first published with the commentary of his grandson Eliezer Kalir (1893–1968) under the abovementioned title.

18 Moyshe Litvakov, Di sistem fun iberzetsungen II [The System of Translations II], in: Bikher-Velt (Book World) 1 (1919), no. 4–5, 37–44, here 38.

Expressionism. Writers and poets, artists and theater people attempted to integrate the diverse elements in the new proletarian culture system. Despite the declared break with, and contempt for, any tradition, their basic technique—the intertextual blending of proletarian, religious, and modernist rhetorical devices—was inherited from their predecessors, "classic" Yiddish writers and literati like Peretz and Zhitlovski, who had early recognized the role of heterogeneity in cultural and literary development. That was why they had translated world literature into Yiddish, adopted new writing techniques, and integrated modern ideas and modes of thinking in their own works. Although proletarian Yiddish writers claimed to establish an explicitly proletarian cultural network within the framework of Russian-based Sovietism, their rhetorics and writing technique reveal their successorship to Peretz, Zhitlovski and many other proponents of an open Yiddish culture as part of world culture.

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Author

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GIL WEISSBLEI

Milgroim: Unmasking the Hebrew Identity of a Yiddish Journal

In Berlin of the early 1920s, one of the most prestigious Russian journals of art ever published in the West, a fortress of conservative, anti-revolutionary style, became the unlikely model for a modern Hebrew periodical with the ambition to breathe new life into the Jewish art world. Rachel and Mark Wischnitzer's publication not only shared its design with Aleksandr Kogan's *Zhar Ptitsa* (The Firebird), but sometimes even illustrations.[1] However, in Germany, where young Constructivists, Futurists, and other modernist Russian-born artists spread daring ideas in wildly experimental publications, the launch of an art journal so traditionalist without vociferous manifesto was hardly innovative.

Rachel Bernstein and Mark Wischnitzer met in St. Petersburg, in 1911, in the editorial office of the *Evreyskaya ėntsiklopediya* (Jewish Encyclopedia) and married in the Summer of 1912. A few years earlier, Rachel returned from Paris after graduating from the École Spéciale d'Architecture to become one of the first three women in Europe with a diploma in architecture. In 1909–1910, she studied art history in Munich under Carl Voll and Fritz Burger, establishing herself as a historian of architecture (**fig. 1**). Mark Wischnitzer was a young historian, one of Simon Dubnow's brilliant disciples. An Austrian citizen, he left Russia at the outbreak of World War I and joined the Austrian army. During the war, Rachel Bernstein-Wischnitzer lived in Vienna and in Berlin. After a short stay in London in 1921, the couple settled in the capital of the Weimar Republic, which developed into a bustling hub of Hebrew and Yiddish publishing in the early twenties. The Wischnitzers' outlook on their mission as historians, to inform and educate the Jewish public through historical documents and works of art, was the seed from which the idea for *Rimon* (Pomegranate) grew.

In 1922, Rimon, the first Jewish publishing house devoted exclusively to the arts, came to life with the support of Russian Jewish philanthropist Il'ya Paenson, who was also financing Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik's Hebrew

1 Susanne Marten-Finnis / Igor Dukhan, Dream and Experiment. Time and Style in 1920s Berlin Émigré Magazines. "Zhar Ptitsa" and "Milgroym," in: East European Jewish Affairs 35 (2005), no. 2, 225–244.

In Their Surroundings, 263–272 | doi.org/10.13109/9783666306112.263

Fig. 1: Rachel Bernstein-Wischnitzer. Berlin, 1922.

publishing house Dvir.[2] Paenson had been won over with the idea of a supposedly novel type of literature on a range of hitherto unexplored topics for the Hebrew audience. The Wischnitzers' main partner and advisor was Aleksandr Kogan, a Berlin-based émigré from Russia and one of the

2 On the activities of this publishing house in greater detail, see Gil Weissblei, Kav ve-naki. Teḥiyatah shel omanut ha-sefer ha-ivri be-Republikat Weimar [Kav ve-naki. The Revival of Hebrew Book Art in Weimar Germany], Jerusalem 2019, 155–244.

world's leading experts on printing and publishing. His cooperation with the Wischnitzers was only one of many projects he undertook as publisher of art books alongside his own journal, *Zhar Ptitsa*.[3] Kogan's influence on the style, typographic design, and printing techniques of Rimon's publications was enormous. His contacts to one of the best printing shops in the world at the time, Dr. Selle & Co., enabled an unusual partnership granting Rimon access to the offset technique as the first publishing house in the history of Hebrew printing. While preparing to publish a series of books, Rachel and Mark Wischnitzer decided to launch an art journal as a platform for their own writings and aesthetic ideology. With a wider Jewish audience in mind, however, they concluded that limiting their activities to Hebrew would miss the point, and the idea for a Yiddish twin journal took shape. Given the polyglot environment of Russian Jewish immigrants in that period, the decision of a Hebrew publishing house to establish a Yiddish journal was not surprising: Here were two Jewish cultural activists who had recently arrived from Soviet Russia publishing Hebrew books in a German-speaking country, while their main spoken language remained Russian, generally mixed with Yiddish. At that time, Yiddish and Hebrew were still international Jewish languages, and in Berlin of the 1920s, unlike in other places, the competition or even hostility between them was almost non-existent.[4]

In early 1922, Rachel Bernstein-Wischnitzer met with two leading Jewish avant-garde artists, who had just arrived from Soviet Russia: Issachar Ber Ryback and Nathan Altman. She had first made their acquaintance some four years earlier, in Kyiv.[5] Bernstein-Wischnitzer was fascinated by the thriving Jewish art scene in postrevolutionary Russia. As the art editor of the planned Yiddish periodical, she believed a central place should be given to these young, innovative artists who created original modern Jewish art.[6]

Altman and Ryback belonged to a group of creatives who had begun organizing in the Kultur-Lige (Culture League) shortly after the Bolshevik Revolution in Kyiv.[7] The ideology of this powerful organization, which also

3 Vladimir Khazan, Ob izdatele A. Ė. Kogane [On the Publisher A. Ė. Kogan], in: Lekhaim 185 (September 2007), no. 9, 113–136.

4 Naomi Brenner, "Milgroym and Rimon," Fraternal Twins, in: In Geveb. A Journal of Yiddish Studies, 6 June 2018, <https://ingeveb.org/blog/milgroym-and-rimon-fraternal-twins> (11 August 2022).

5 R. [Rachel] Bernstein-Wischnitzer, Jüdische Kunst in Kiew und Petrograd (1918–1920), in: Der Jude (1920/21), no. 5–6, 353–356.

6 Rahel Wischnitzer-Bernstein, Eine Selbst-Anzeige (der Zeitschrift "Rimon"), in: Soncino-Blätter. Beiträge zur Kunde des jüdischen Buches (1925–1926), 95 f.

7 Hillel Kazovsky, Khudozhniki Kul'tur-Ligi / The Artists of the Kultur-Lige, Moscow / Jerusalem 2003, 176–191 and 230–247.

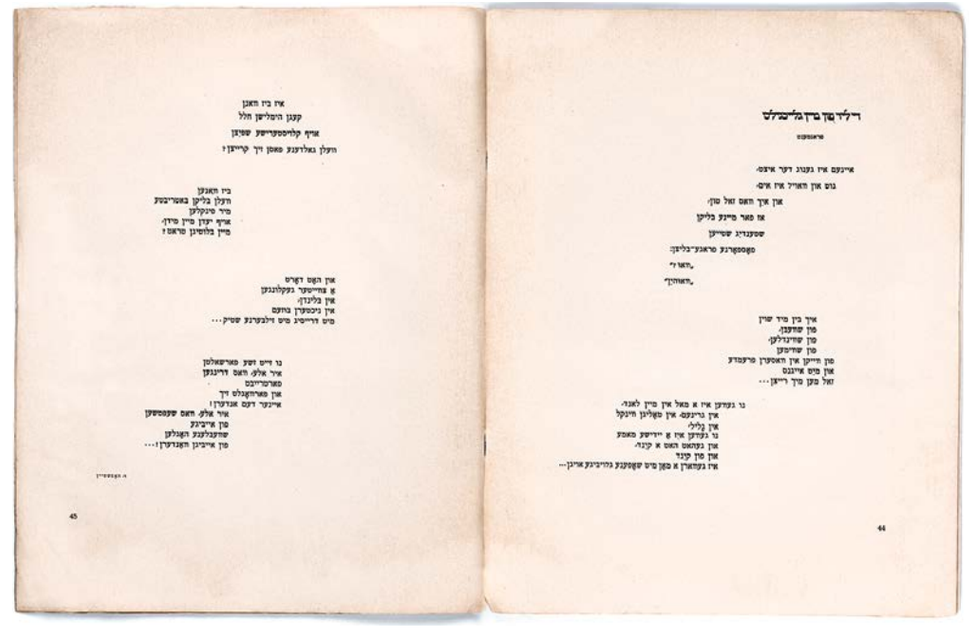
had certain social and political functions during the short-term Jewish autonomy in Ukraine from 1918 to 1920, was rooted in the creation of a new Jewish culture in the spirit of modernism and revolutionary socialism. Nevertheless, despite mutual appreciation and even friendship between Bernstein-Wischnitzer and some of the avant-garde artists, there was a gaping chasm between them, created by their different socio-cultural backgrounds and perspectives on art. Bernstein-Wischnitzer was a scholar from a wealthy Jewish family. Her academic interest in Jewish art was in many ways alien to the young revolutionary artists and writers, most of whom had been brought up in the Pale of Settlement.

The desire of these avant-gardists to break with conventions found expression in the bold designs but also material choices for their books and pamphlets: The quality of paper was poor, the printing cheap, generally in one or two colors only. This frugality did not just result from the difficult reality of their lives—good paper and printing were beyond their reach—it was also ideologically motivated. Directly influenced by Russian Futurism and German Expressionism, the young artists and authors aimed to minimize and simplify all elements of the printed word, the textual and the material ones. Total absence of any kind of decoration, simple and direct language, sharp fonts and minimalist design—all these were typical features of new Yiddish periodicals published in Soviet Russia after the revolution. The contents of these journals and magazines matched their form, emphasizing the chaos and break with the old world, but also the new and original use of religious tradition (fig. 2).[8]

It is nearly impossible, on the other hand, to find a single Hebrew literary journal which represented all those daring values and identified with the avant-garde movement. Contrary to Yiddish, which the Communist regime deemed the "language of the Jewish proletariat" and therefore a suitable medium of mass culture, Hebrew continued to develop in post-World War I Europe under its "old leadership" of writers such as Ḥayyim Naḥman Bialik and David Frishman, who were far removed from socialist views and audacious avant-garde ideas. In fact, the number of Hebrew readers declined from the turn of the twentieth century onward, in contrast to a growing number of Yiddish readers. The younger generations abandoned Hebrew literature in favor of Yiddish or European literatures, while the older generations remained loyal readers of nineteenth-century Haskalah novels and rejected modern Hebrew writing.[9]

8 Seth L. Wolitz, The Jewish National Art Renaissance in Russia, in: Ruth Apter-Gabriel (ed.), Tradition and Revolution. The Jewish Renaissance in Russian Avant-Garde Art 1912–1928, Jerusalem 1987, 21–42, here 35f.

9 Zohar Shavit, On the Hebrew Cultural Center in Berlin in the Twenties. Hebrew Culture in Europe—The Last Attempt, in: Gutenberg-Jahrbuch 68 (1993), 371–380.



The Hebrew authors and publishers from Russia who concentrated in Berlin at the beginning of the 1920s were therefore catering to a very small audience, a mere handful of intellectuals scattered across Europe. This elite had considerable influence on the design of Hebrew books, although great efforts were made to give the impression of a wider and more general readership. This phenomenon has some similar aspects to the publishing activity, which took place in Berlin at the same time, among the Russian émigrés severed all ties with the literary scene in their forsaken homeland, even refusing the new Russian orthography, enforced by the Bolsheviks. It was a statement of opposition to all the radical changes sweeping Russian culture at the time and of adherence to prerevolutionary values. For decades, almost until the late 1950s, Russian books printed in the West were using the old orthography.[10]

Aleksandr Kogan's decision to design Rachel and Mark Wischnitzer's twin journals, the Hebrew *Rimon* and the Yiddish *Milgroim*, in the same style as his Russian journal suited the aesthetic taste and expectations of both the publishers and their sponsor, Ilya Paenson. The combination of fine paper, plenty of high-quality color plates, and texts printed in simple,

Fig. 2: Dovid Hofstheyn's *Di lid fun mayn glaykhgilt* (The Poem of My Indifference), published in the first issue of *Milgroim* in 1922, with a typographical design by Issachar Ber Ryback.

10 N. I. Golubeva-Monatkina, Émigrantskaya russkaya rech' [Emigrant Russian Speech], in: E.V. Krasil'nikova (ed.), Russkiy yazyk zarubezh'ya [Russian Language Abroad], Moscow 2001, 8–68.

yet sophisticated typographic style, made the three art journals look classic, impressive, and elegant. But as much as this conservative style fit the Russian and the Hebrew texts, it threw the Yiddish journal into utter disharmony.

The Hebrew identity of Rimon publishing house and its journal was evident, naturally continuing the cultural activities begun in Odessa and St. Petersburg. However, the Yiddish identity of *Milgroim* was vague and even odd. Yiddish culture after World War I had been changed and reshaped in major ways.[11] Between 1915 and 1917, Yitskhok Leybush Peretz, Sholem Aleichem, and Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh (Mendele Moykher-Sforim), the three central pillars of Yiddish literature, had passed away. Their death did not only symbolize the end of an era, but also cut the connection between Hebrew and Yiddish, since there was no other Yiddish writer "after them […] who was able to bridge this fatal gap," as Chone Shmeruk wrote in the 1960s.[12] From that point onward, Yiddish literature became divided between various ideological tendencies. During the early 1920s, young revolutionary authors took center stage, including the "Kyiv group," which split into two active circles in Moscow and in Berlin. Dovid Bergelson[13] and Der Nister[14] (pseudonym of Pinkhes Kahanovitsh) were leading members of the Berlin group.

Surprisingly, Rachel Bernstein-Wischnitzer, who barely read Yiddish, and Mark Wischnitzer, who was far from being avant-garde, began to work with those young modernist Yiddish writers from Soviet Russia. The first issue of *Milgroim* mentioned Der Nister and Dovid Bergelson as chief editors, although Mark Wischnitzer and Baruch Krupnik (Karu), a young Hebrew scholar who translated all the articles from Hebrew and Russian into Yiddish, had done most of the editing.[15]

Der Nister and Bergelson tried, at first, to bring together a group of Yiddish writers for the new literary journal, but could not conciliate their avant-garde principles with the bourgeois-conservative style dictated by the Wischnitzers and their partner Aleksandr Kogan. While the first issue of *Milgroim* does contain pieces by some of the leading Yiddish modernists, such as Moyshe Kulbak, Dovid Hofshteyn, Dovid Bergelson, and Der Nister, their bold experimental style seems out of place next to the learned articles

11 Benjamin Harshav, Ha-tarbut ha-aḥeret. Yidish ve-ha-shiaḥ ha-yehudi [The Other Culture. Yiddish and Jewish Discourse], Jerusalem 2006, 148–157.

12 Chone Shmeruk, art. "Yidish" [Yiddish], in: Encyclopaedia Hebraica, 32 vols., here vol. 19, Jerusalem 1968, 804f. (Heb.).

13 Joseph Sherman, David Bergelson (1884–1952). A Biography, in: idem/Gennady Estraikh (eds.), David Bergelson. From Modernism to Socialist Realism, Leeds 2007, 7–78.

14 Mikhail Krutikov, Der Nister's Soviet Years. Yiddish Writer as Witness to the People, Bloomington, Ind., 2019, 1–15.

15 Rachel Wischnitzer, From My Archives, in: Journal of Jewish Art 6 (1979), 6–15.

and essays on art and history in the very same issue. The disharmony between literary and scholarly texts is emphasized by the graphic design and combination of color illustrations from medieval Hebrew manuscripts alongside handwritten titles imitating ancient Hebrew Ashkenazic lettering (fig. 3).

Yoysef Tshaykov, a leading artist of the Soviet Kultur-Lige, criticized *Milgroim's* contradictions in style and content in the strongest terms. In the third issue of the Yiddish magazine *Der Shtrom* (The Stream), published in Moscow in November 1922, soon after the appearance of *Milgroim*, Tshaykov wrote, "*Milgroim* is an inscription on a tombstone, it is dead and its editors work for the dead." He continued his tirade against the young journal, moreover taking a swipe at its Russian source of inspiration:

> "Despite its sweet Yiddish title, this journal is a twin of another 'dead,' the Russian journal *Zhar Ptitsa*, which is also published in Berlin. *Zhar Ptitsa* is the anesthetic injection for the idea of the wandering Russian artist, while in Russia itself art has managed to create new revolutionary works of art and to confront new challenges, shaking the old rules of aesthetics […]. Generally, *Milgroim* is a mixture of old and new elements, each one different from the other, disconnected and therefore meaningless. An artistic publication with no liveliness, which cannot capture the spirit of the new groups created by young Jewish artists, is condemned to paralysis and death."[16]

Fig. 3: First page of the Rimon Publishing Company's prospectus, 1922, designed by Rachel Bernstein-Wischnitzer.

16 Yoysef Tshaykov, Bibliografye. Milgroym [Bibliography. Milgroim], in: Der Shtrom 1 (1922), no. 3, 78f.

Although Tshaykov's criticism is clearly political, it raises some important questions on the connection between content and design in the Jewish context. Modern Yiddish literature, Tshaykov claimed, was modern not only in content, but also in the way it was presented to the audience. He considered the elegant style and expensive look of the journal old-fashioned and, while befitting Hebrew literature, wholly unsuitable for Yiddish.

The young Hebrew literature of those days did not gravitate toward modernist structures and styles, and its leaders were still part of the old Jewish bourgeoisie of the former Russian Empire. Aleksandr Kogan and the Wischnitzers were not aware of the huge differences that had emerged between the Yiddish and the Hebrew culture. What was renovation to Hebraists, was reactionism to Yiddishists. The revival of Hebrew book art in Weimar Germany was a true revolution in the attitude toward the aesthetics of the non-religious Hebrew printed word. Its makers were conservative revolutionists, led by almost the same group of people who had been dominating modern Hebrew literature from its birth in Russia, a quarter of a century before. Bringing the old European standards of high quality printing into the bleak realities of modern Hebrew publishing, was, to them, no less daring than adapting Cubism for Jewish avant-garde art.

Although Tshaykov's criticism of *Milgroim* was sincere, it is hard to ignore its pro-Soviet ideological context. *Der Shtrom*, the journal that published his article, was a Jewish literary mouthpiece of the Soviet Communist Party, and, as such, under the strict supervision of the Evsektsiya, its Jewish section.[17] Therefore, Bergelson and Der Nister's reaction to the criticism was prompt: The very same issue of *Der Shtrom* featured a *Letter to the Editor*, signed by the two:

> "Dear editors,
> we would like to announce to all our colleagues that, even if the journal *Milgroim* includes any of our written works or indicates our participation in it, we have no connection to the editorial board of that journal, and we have ceased our cooperation with it."[18]

The names of Bergelson and Der Nister were never again mentioned in any of the following five issues of *Milgroim* before its discontinuation. In November 1922, Moshe Kleinmann, one of the Hebrew Zionist writers who had left Soviet Russia with Bialik a year before, was appointed literary editor of *Milgroim*. Under his editorship, no works by pro-Soviet writers were published,[19] and most of the journal's contents were translated from Hebrew.

17 Gennady Estraikh, In Harness. Yiddish Writers' Romance with Communism, New York 2005, 56.

18 This letter to the editorial board was printed on the last page of the issue, with no title and only one comment: "Before closing the issue, the editorial board has received the following letter." Dovid Bergelson / Der Nister (Pinkhes Kahanovitsh), Letter to the Editor, in: Der Shtrom 1 (1922), no. 3, 83.

The fact that *Milgroim* was not created by Yiddishists nor meant to advance Yiddish culture struck Yiddish literati and artists like Tshaykov from the very beginning. Initially attracted to the new journal, Yiddish writers quickly distanced themselves from what they perceived as inauthentic platform for their voices. *Milgroim* never amounted to anything more than the mirror of a Hebrew journal, designed by people who were not intimate with Yiddish culture and in some ways even ignorant of it. By contrast, critics of the Wischnitzers' Hebrew twin journal *Rimon* never realized that its graphic design was made by the non-Jewish German artist Ernst Böhm and the lettering works by Franziska Baruch, who was not proficient in Hebrew. Their work and Aleksandr Kogan's elegant Russian touch were convincing enough and a fine fit for a modern Hebrew art journal. But in the eyes of those truly committed to a new Yiddish style, the imposition of the same conservative look on a supposedly Yiddish journal spoke to a discrepancy in design and content that seemed bizarre to them at best, if not subversive: a Hebrew journal behind a thin Yiddish mask (fig. 4).

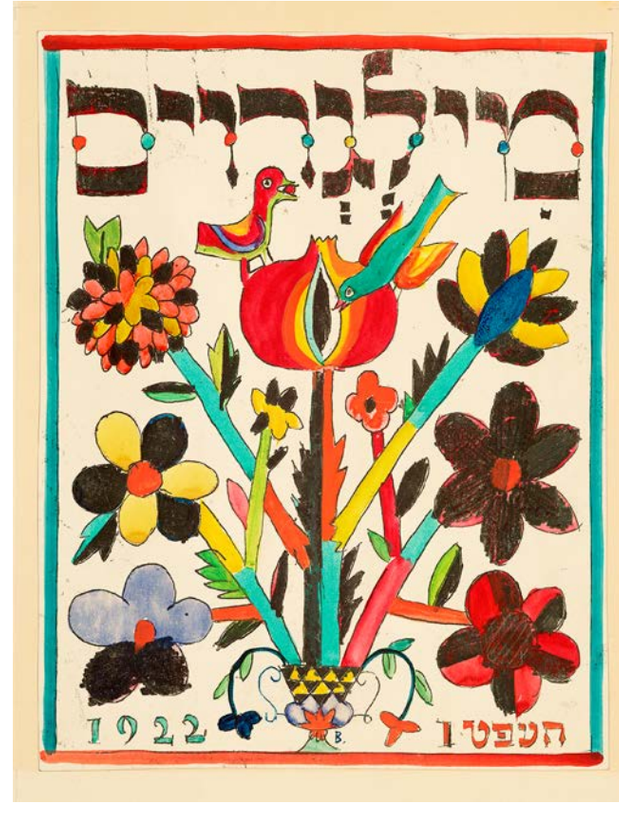


Fig. 4: A sketch for the cover of the first issue of *Milgroim* by Ernst Böhm, 1922.

19 An exception is a single poem by Leyb Kvitko which was published in the fourth issue of *Milgroim*.

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Maria Kühn-Ludewig, Jiddische Bücher aus Berlin (1918–1936). Titel, Personen, Verlage, 2nd, extended edition, Nümbrecht 2008.

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Gil Weissblei, The Revival of Hebrew Book Art in Weimar Germany, Jerusalem 2019 (Heb.).

Author

Gil Weissblei is an archivist and researcher of modern Hebrew book culture. He studied comparative literature, philosophy, and archival studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and, in 2015, received his PhD from the same university. Between 2002 and 2008, he was senior archivist at the Israel State Archives and later senior archivist and curator at the National Library of Israel (2008–2019). Since 2002, he has been the director of the Haim Hazaz Memorial Foundation Archives in Jerusalem. His current research focuses on the cultural influence of Israeli printers, designers, and publishers. *Selected Publications*: Josef Kaplan. Portrait of a Forgotten Hebrew Typographer, in: Gil Weissblei (ed.), Rafael Weiser Memorial Volume. Studies in Manuscripts, Archives and Agnon's Writing, Jerusalem 2020, 143–187 (Heb.); Hebrew Book Printing and Design in Israel in the 20th Century, in: Encyclopedia of Jewish Book Cultures Online, ed. by Emile Schrijver, 2021, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2772-4026_EJBO_SIM_031569> (11 August 2022); In Search of a New Jewish Art. Leonid Pasternak in Jerusalem, in: Ars Judaica 13 (2017), no. 1, 91–110.

Glossary of Spelling of Writers' Names

Name	Dates of Birth and Deaths	Hebrew	Yiddish	Russian	Spelling Variations
Yosef Ḥayyim Brenner	1881–1921	יוסף חיים ברנר	יוסף חיים ברענער	Йосеф Хаим Бренер	Joseph Ḥayyim Brenner Yosef Haim/ Ḥayim Brenner
David Frishman	1859–1922	דוד פרישמן	דוד פֿרישמאַן	Давид Фришман	David Frischmann
Uri Nissan Gnessin	1879–1913	אורי ניסן גנסין	אורי ניסן גנעסין	Ури Нисон Гнесин	Uri Nisan Gnessin
Leah Goldberg	1911–1970	לאה גולדברג	לאה גאָלדבערג	Леа Гольдберг	Lea Goldberg
Dovid Hofshteyn	1889–1952	דוד הופשטיין	דוד האָפֿשטיין	Давид Гофштейн	David Hofstein
Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky	1880–1940	זאב (ולדימיר) ז'בוטינסקי	וואָלף /זאב/ וולאַדימיר זשאַבאָטינסקי	Владимир Жаботинский	Vladimir (Ze'ev) Zhabotinsky/ Zhabotinski
Moyshe Kulbak	1896–1937	משה קולבק	משה קולבאַק	Моисей Кульбак	Майсей Кульбак (belarus.) Moische Kulbak
Ḥayyim Lenski (Shteynson)	1905–1943	חיים לנסקי	חיים לענסקי	Хаим Ленский	Haim Lenski/ Lensky Ḥayim Lenski
Dvoyre Fogel	1900–1942	דבורה פוגל	דבֿורה פֿאָגעל	Дебора Фогель	Dvora Vogel Debora(h) Vogel

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Fig. 1: Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://lccn.loc.gov/99466751>.

Naomi Brenner, Hebrew Critic Par Excellence: David Frishman

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Fig. 3: Ha-Tekufah 2 (1918)/Internet Archive, <urn:oclc:record:25586768>.

Lilah Nethanel, The Threshold of Sensibilities: David Frishman's Introduction to the Hebrew Translation of George Eliot's Novel *Daniel Deronda* (1893)

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Fig. 3: George Eliot, Daniel Dironda, transl. by David Frishman, Warsaw: Aḥiasaf publishing 1893.
Figs. 4 and 5: George Eliot, Daniel Dironda, transl. by David Frishman, Warsaw: Aḥiasaf publishing 1893, 5 f.
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Dekel Shay Schory, The Shadows of Death: Uri Nissan Gnessin

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Fig. 3: Gnazim Archive—Hebrew Writers Association, Israel.

Natasha Gordinsky, Staging Provincial Poetics: A Close Reading of Uri Nissan Gnessin's *Ha-ẓidah* (Sideways, 1905)

Fig. 1: Gnazim Archive—Hebrew Writers Association, Israel.
Figs. 2 and 3: Uri Nisan Gnesin, Ha-ẓidah, Jerusalem: Defus Aḥdut 1913/Internet Archive, <http://gwnma.wrlc.org/ark:/38989/c0166t29q>.
Fig. 4: Stade-Auktionen e. K.

Matan Hermoni, Between Here, Now, and Then: Yosef Ḥayyim Brenner

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Roni Henig, Troubled Speech, Hebrew Subjects, and the Problem of Meaning-Making: Speaking Hebrew in Yosef Ḥayyim Brenner's *Shkhol ve-kishalon* (Breakdown and Bereavement, 1920)

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Figs. 2 and 3: Yosef Ḥayim Brener, Shkhol ve-kishalon, New York/Warsaw/Moscow: A. Y. Shtibl 1920/Internet Archive, <urn:oclc:record:755749680>.

Anastasiya Lyubas, A Yiddish Modernist from Lwów: Dvoyre Fogel

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Fig. 2: Dvoyre Fogel, Tog-figurn, Lwów: Farlag Tsushtayer 1930.
Fig. 3: Inzikh 49 (1938)/The National Library of Israel.

Anna Maja Misiak, Now Is Before and After: The Suspension of Time in Dvoyre Fogel's Cycle *Mide kleyder* (Tired Dresses, 1925–1929)

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Frieder von Ammon, The Poetics of Birdsong: Moyshe Kulbak

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Efrat Gal-Ed, A Delicious Cooing and Chirping: Reading the First Chapter of Moyshe Kulbak's *Munye der foygl-hendler un Malkele zayn vayb* (Munye the Bird Seller and Malkele His Wife, 1928)

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Fig. 2: Efrat Gal-Ed/Simon Neuberg/Daria Vakhrushova (eds.), Iber der grenets/Über die Grenze/Crossing the Border. Anthologie moderner jiddischer Kurzgeschichten/An Anthology of Modern Yiddish Short Stories, Berlin: Düsseldorf University Press 2021, 403.
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Enrico Lucca, Always Far from the Center: Ḥayyim Lenski and Hebrew Poetry in Russia between the Wars

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Figs. 2, 3, and 4: The National Library of Israel/Gnazim Archive—Hebrew Writers Association, Israel.

Rafi Tsirkin-Sadan, Hebrew Verse and the End of St. Petersburg: Close Reading of Ḥayyim Lenski's *Ha-yom yarad* (The Day Came Down, ca. 1930)

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Tetyana Yakovleva, "I Am the Child of My Time": Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky

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Svetlana Natkovich, A Rhetoric of Evasion: Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky's *Sipur yamai* (Story of My Life, 1936)

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Fig. 2: Ze'ev Jabotinsky, Sipur yamai, in: Ktavim nivharim, vol. 1: Golah ve-hitbolelut, Tel Aviv 1936.
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Werner Nell, Vessels of Verse on Waves of Destruction: Dovid Hofshteyn

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Fig. 3: Dovid Hofshteyn, Gezamlte verk, vol. 1, Kyiv: Kultur-Lige 1923/Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/nybc211139>.

Sabine Koller, Names Written on the Ruins of Tyranny …: Dovid Hofshteyn and His Translation of Aleksandr Pushkin's *K Chaadaevu* (To Chaadaev, 1938)

Figs. 1 and 2: A. S. Pushkin, Lirik un epigramen, transl. by Dovid Hofshteyn, Kyiv: Melukhe-Farlag far di Natsyonale Minderheytn in USSR 1938/The National Library of Israel.
Fig. 3: A. S. Pushkin, Lirik un epigramen, transl. by Dovid Hofshteyn, Kyiv: Melukhe-Farlag far di Natsyonale Minderheytn in USSR 1938/The National Library of Israel.
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Annette Wolf, Rooted and Uprooted: Leah Goldberg in Europe

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Sivan Beskin, Visit to Aunt Zlata: Reading a Scene from *Ve-hu ha-or* (And This Is the Light, 1946) by Leah Goldberg

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Daria Vakhrushova, The Soviet Yiddish Literati on Culture: Between Modernism and Sovietism

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Gil Weissblei, *Milgroim*: Unmasking the Hebrew Identity of a Yiddish Journal

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Fig. 4: UdK Berlin, UdK-Archiv 371—66.